

V. Bellarmine (R.) Cardinal

Steps of Ascension T O GOD.

Written Originally in Latin
By the Famous Cardinal
BELLARMINE.

Done into English by a Divine of the
Church of *England.*

The Second Edition.

L O N D O N,

Printed, and are to be Sold by
W. FREEMAN, at the *Bible*, over
against the *Middle Temple Gate*, in
Fleetstreet, MDCCV.

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Westminster, MDCCLV.

TO THE
Protestant Reader.

Don't Imagine, good Reader, when thou seest the Name of Cardinal Bellarmine, the great Champion of the Roman Cause, that thou art going to be disputed out of thy Religion; assure thy self here is not in this whole Manual, so much as one Argument to beget in thee a Dislike of that which thou professest, and consequently, no Design to carry thee over to any distant Communion: Thou hast not here to do with Bellarmine the Polemick, and Controversial, but with Bellarmine the Practical Divine. Thou findest him not in the Consistory, but retir'd to his Closet, stripp'd of his Cardinal Robes, and appearing in the mean Habit of a Christian Pilgrim. Thou wilt discover no other Aim or Intention, but to make thee a true, zealous, and a sincere Christian: To take off thy Affections from this vain, and perishing World, and to fix 'em where Felicity can only be found. In order to so great an End, he presents thee with a noble Idea of the Creator of the Universe: With such a Representati-

To the Reader.

on of his Greatness and Purity, his Power and Wisdom, his Mercy and Justice, that 'twill be hard for thee to read with Advertency, and not to have awful and reverend Apprehensions of Him, or not to endeavour after a suitable Behaviour towards so Adorable a Being.

The Good things above, and these below, he sets in so true a Light, that all Sublunary will appear what they really are, mere Trifles and Childish Vanities; the Celestial infinitely valuable, and worthy thy most solicitous pursuit. He very frequently puts thee in Mind, that thou consistest of Soul as well as Body: And tells thee there is Food as proper to the one as the other, and that the Soul is no less capable of Starving than the Body. Nor is he more industrious to convince thee of the necessity of Spiritual Food, than careful to provide it for thee: Such indeed as well digested, will preserve thy Soul in a state of Health and Vigour, as will keep it from surfeiting on Riches, Pleasures, and Honours: As will secure it from the Lethargy of Indifferency and Indevotion: From the Tumours of Pride and Presumption, from the Spiritelesness of Despair; and, in a word, such Food as will in some measure enable thee to run the Race that is set before thee, and to mount up with Eagles wings to the place of Rest and Tranquillity. And

To the Reader.

And as the Book is replete with Notions truly sublime, pious, and Christian, (such, and so many as thou wilt hardly meet with elsewhere in so little room,) so are they orderly Digested, and Regularly Methodiz'd. It is no confus'd, incoherent Rhapsody, but a perfect Concatenation, of Thoughts, the first Link naturally directing to the 2d, the 2d to the 3d, and so on to the end of the Chain.

It was from the Consideration of the serviceableness of this Manual to the Nobler part, that the Author call'd it his Benjamin, the Child of his Delight, that he preferr'd it so much to the rest of his Practical or Devotional Tracts, as to make it not only his Favourite, but Companion, and to treat the other, in comparison with this, as Foreigners, and such as had no Relation to him.

Now if the Original merit the Opinion I have of it, and this account be justifiable, I shall need to make no Apology for attempting to make it more publick, no, tho' I should not have done Right to the Author, because probably I may put some of better Abilities, and more leisure, upon supplying my Deficiencies. And as I shall be very well pleas'd if it meets with a kind Reception, so if the contrary be its Fate, I shall not be disturb'd, being conscious of a good Intention, that is, not of Translating either for Applause, or Profit, or out of a vain desiring of appearing
in

To the Reader.

in Print, but from an hopeful Prospect it may have a good Effect upon some, as I humbly and comfortably conceive it has already had upon my self.

What remains is to acquaint thee that I have omitted a few passages in the Original, (scarcely amounting to three Pages) relating to Saints or Angels, or looking like Legendary Reports, because I would remove all prejudice. By this Mutilation the Book loses none of its Strength, for the Passages I speak of are Supernumerary, the Author having sufficiently both prov'd and clear'd his Points without them.

Hampstead June 11th 1703

H. HALL.

THE

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ERRATA.

Page 15, line 14, for *Impossibility* read *Impassibility*. p. 29, l. 4, r. *Conso-*
lations. p. 36, after the Third Step, add, *From the Consideration of*
the Earth. p. 44, l. 7, for *Sublety* r. *Subtlety*. p. 73, l. 4, for *pruder* r.
proper. p. 80, l. 5, for *as* read *us*. p. 134, after Ch. 8th, r. *Ninthly*. p. 142,
 after *thou* add *hast*. p. 145, l. 17, for *be* r. *God*. p. 160, l. 19, for *shall*
 r. *shalt*. p. 165, l. 13, r. *Virtue*. p. 169, l. 8, r. *as are*. p. 171, l. 8, r.
Humility. p. 219, l. 13, after *Honour*, add *to God*. p. 235, l. 31, for
Man's r. *Mankind*.

THE
FIRST STEP
OF THE
Ladder of Ascension
TO
G O D.

From the Consideration of Man.

CHAP. I.

HE that desires in earnest to erect a Ladder by which he may ascend as high as to God Almighty, ought to make the first Step, from the Consideration of himself. For every Individual amongst us, is both the Creature and Image of God, and nothing is nearer to us than our selves. *Moses* therefore with good reason thus advises, *Attend to; or narrowly*
B ly

Steps of Ascension to God.

ly observe thy self. Upon which words *Basil* the great compos'd a notable Discourse. For he that shall carefully survey the outward, and diligently inspect the inner Man, will find himself to be a sort of Epitome, and Abridgement of the Universe, and hence easily take his Rise to the Creator of all things.

But my Design at present is, only to inquire into the four common Causes. *viz.* 1. The Author of my Being. 2. The Materials he compos'd me of. 3. The Form he endow'd me with. 4. For what End he produc'd me.

For by enquiring after the Author of my Being, I shall find him to be God alone. If I enquire after the Matter I am made of, it will appear to be entirely nothing; from whence I must needs infer, that all that is in me was made by God, and that He has the sole Right and Propriety in me. If I enquire after my Form, I shall find that I am the Image of God. If I make enquiry after my End, I shall find the same God, to be my supream and compleat Happiness. By this I must needs understand that I am so nearly related to God, and have so great a dependence upon him, that He, and none but He is my Creator, the Author of my Being, that He is my Father, my Example, Happiness, and all things. And when my Understanding shall be so far enlightned, is it possible I should not seek him with the greatest ardour and desire? How can my thoughts not be taken up with the Contemplation of him? How must my heart pant after him? how must my Soul long to behold and enjoy him? with what horror must I reflect on the stupidity

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of my heart, which for days, and months, and years, hath had nothing less in its thoughts and quest than God, who alone is all things to me?

CHAP. II.

BUT let us a little more nicely examine each particular. I ask thee, my Soul, who it was that caus'd thee to be, when not long since thou hadst no Being? The Parents of thy flesh certainly did not beget thee, for that which is born of the flesh, is flesh; but thou art not flesh but Spirit; neither did Heaven or Earth, the Sun or Stars produce thee, for these are bodies, but thou art incorporeal. Nor could'st thou be owing for thy Being to Angels, or Archangels, or other spiritual Creatures, for thou art not produc'd from Matter, but created purely out of nothing, but none but an omnipotent God can bring something out of nothing. God then alone, when he saw fit, without any Co-adjutor or Assistant, with his own hands, which are his Understanding and Will, did give thee Being. But perhaps thou wilt say, it was not God himself, but some of his Creatures that produc'd thy Body; so that the Soul ought to acknowledge God for her Author, but the Body should ascribe its Being to Parents. This is a great mistake; for though God make use of Parents that are Men and Women to beget flesh, as of the meanest Labourers to build an House, yet He himself not only is, but expects

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peets to be called, the Master-builder, the real and true Father of both Soul and Body, and consequently of the whole Man. For if they who begat thy flesh, were indeed the Authors, and (as I may say) the Architects of thy Body, they, no doubt, would know, how many Muscles, Veins, and Nerves, how many greater and lesser Bones, how many Humours, and Cavities could be found in an humane Body, all which they are ignorant of, unless they inform themselves from Anatomy. Besides, when the Body is distemper'd, when a Member is decay'd or cut off, were they indeed the Authors of the Body, that very Art which at first enabled them to frame it, would no question empower them to repair it: as you know, they who make Clocks, or build Houses, understand how to dispose the several parts, and when disorder'd, to set them right again. But these are things surpassing the Power and Knowledge of Parents. Consider farther, that the joyning together of Soul and Body, which is the principal part in the make of humane Nature, can only be effected by an Artift of infinite Power. For by what Art inferior to divine, can Flesh and Spirit be so closely conjoyn'd, as to become one Substance? For the Body has no proportion, nor similitude with a Spirit. It was He therefore that brought it about, who only doth wonderful things.

Well therefore speaks the Spirit of the Lord by Moses Deut. 32. 6. *Is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath not he made thee and established thee?* And by the mouth of holy Job, 10. 11. *Thou hast clothed me with skin and*
flesh

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flesh, thou hast fenced me with bones and sinews. And by the Royal Prophet, Thy hands have made and fashion'd me. And in another Psalm, Thou hast formed me and laid thine hand upon me. And by that most prudent Woman the Mother of the children of the Maccabees, 2 Mac. 7. 22. I cannot tell how you came into my Womb, for I neither gave you Breath nor Life, neither was it I that formed the Members of every one of you, but doubtless the Creator of the World, who formed the Generation of Man, and found out the beginning of all things. From which Consideration our Lord Christ, who is the Wisdom of God, enjoyns us to call no one Father upon Earth, Because one is your Father who is in Heaven. From whose Admonition St. Augustin thus addressed himself to God, touching his Child, that was illegitimately begot; "It is thou who didst so curiously form and fashion him, for, bating the criminal part, I contributed nothing towards him.

Well then, my Soul, if God is the Author of both Soul and Body, if He is thy Father, if thou art supported and maintained at his Expence, if thou derivatest from him all that thou hast, and all thy Expectations are from him, why dost not thou make thy boast of, and glory in, so great a Father? Why dost thou not love him with all thine Heart? Why dost thou not for his Sake look down with an Eye of Contempt upon all earthly, perishing Things? Why dost thou suffer vain Desires to harbour in thy Breast, and to Lord it over thee? Lift up thine Eyes, and look upon him: Stand in no dread of what any Enemy thou hast upon Earth can do unto thee, when

B 3

thou

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thou hast an Almighty Father in Heaven, With what Assurance thinkest thou, and Affection did *David* say, *I am thine, save me?* Couldst thou comprehend, my Soul, what this means, that the Omnipotent and Everlasting God, who stands in no need of thy Goods, whether of Mind, Body, or Estate, and would not suffer the least Detriment in thy Perdition, yet never turns away his Eyes from thee, and is in all Respects as solicitously concerned for thee, as if thou wert his peculiar Treasure; thou wouldest certainly place thy whole Trust and Affiance in him, thou wouldest reverence him as thy Lord, love him as thy Father, nor would the greatest Temporal Good or Evil be able to divert thy Love from him.

C H A P. III.

PROCEED we now to the Matter whereof Man is formed. That indeed is very mean, but the meaner it is, the fitter Matter it suggests to us, of begetting the Virtue of Humility, than which nothing in this State is more beneficial, nothing more rare, nothing therefore more highly to be prized, or more earnestly desired.

As to the Matter then of the Soul without all doubt, it is purely nothing, than which, what can be conceived more despicable and vain? As for the immediate Matter of the Body, what is it but menstruous Blood? A thing so impure and filthy, that our Eyes have an Aversion to behold it, our Hands to touch it,

it, and our Minds an Abhorrence to the very Thoughts of it. What was the first Man composed of but red and barren Earth, but Dust and Clay? *God formed Man*, saith the Scripture, *of the Dust of the Ground*. And again said God to Man, *Dust thou art, and unto Dust shalt thou return*. Wherefore the Patriarch *Abraham*, mindful of his mean Original, does thus preface his Address to the Almighty, *I have taken upon me to speak to my Lord who am but Dust and Ashes*. But we have not yet fully discovered the vileness of that Matter we are made of. For the very Dust or Earth, had its Original from nothing. For in the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth, which certainly he did not produce from another Heaven and Earth, but from nothing. Thus we see all that reduc'd to nothing, whereof that haughty thing called Man is composed, with respect both to Soul and Body. There is nothing therefore whereof he may glory, as if he had not receiv'd it from God. The Works indeed of Men, whatever they are, whether they are the Products of Art or Labour, have always something of themselves, whereof were they sensible, they might glory against their Maker. For a Vessel of Gold, a Chest of Wood, an House of Marble or Ivory, had they the use of Speech, might truly averr to their Maker, *I am owing to thee for my Form*, but not for my Matter, and that is more precious which I have from my self, than what I have receiv'd from thee. But Man, who hath nothing from himself, and of himself is altogether nothing, hath nothing to glory of. And therefore the Apostle affirms very truly, *If*

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any one reckons himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. And, *What hast thou that thou hast not received? but if thou hast received, why boastest thou as if thou hadst not received?* With whom accords St. Cyprian, *We ought to glory in nothing, because we have nothing of our own.*

Object. But you will say, Men are Authors of many noble Works, for which they are deservedly commended, because Virtue improves by Commendation.

Sol. What you say is very true, Men are Authors of many noble Works, which merit Praise, and for which they may glory, provided they pursue the Apostle's Advice, which is, *That he who gloryeth should glory in the Lord.* When a Man hath Accomplished some excellent Work, I desire to know of what Matter he made it? By what Power he was able to go through with it? By whose Direction and Assistance he contriv'd it? He made it, no doubt, from Matter, not which he himself, but which God create. He contriv'd and finish'd it not by his own Strength and Direction, but by God's, without whose Assistance nothing laudable can be effected. God works many good things in Man, without Man's Concurrence, but all the good Man doth, is from a Power derived from God. Therefore God vouchsafeth to use the Ministry of Man in doing that good, which he could do of himself, the more to oblige Man not to assume the Glory to himself, but to glory in the Lord.

Therefore my Soul, if thou art wise, always sit down in the lowest Place, and rob not God, in any Degree, of his Glory. Stoop to
thine

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thine own Nothingness, which is truly thine own, and all the World shall not be able to puff thee up into Pride. But because this precious Virtue of true Humility, was almost departed from the World, and could neither be met with in the Writings of Philosophers, nor in the Morals of the Gentiles, the Master of Humility came down from Heaven, *who being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, and said unto Mankind, Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* Wherefore my Soul, if thou art ashamed to imitate the humility of men, blush not to imitate that of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, and who resisteth the proud, but giveth Grace unto the humble.

CHAP. IV.

IT follows now that we consider the Form, which is the third Cause we propos'd to discourse of. And indeed by how much the Matter whereof Man is made, is more vile and mean, by so much the Form which is given him appears to be more precious and excellent. I shall not take any notice of the exterior Form, that is, the Figure or Shape of Man's Body, which surpasseth that of all other Creatures, for this is not a Substantial but an Accidental Form. The substantial Form then of Man, which makes him to be Man,

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Man, and distinguisheth him from the rest of Animals, is an Immortal Soul, endued with Reason and Free-Will, the Image of God, copied from the divine Original. For when God was pleas'd to make Man, we find that he thus express'd himself ; Gen. 1. 1. *Let us make man in our Image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattel, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the face of the earth.* Man then is the Image of God, not upon the account of his Body, but his Spirit, for God is a Spirit, not a Body. There, as St. Basil saith, is the Image of God, where there is that which commands the rest of the Creatures. But Man hath Command over the Beasts, not by virtue of the Members of his Body, which in respect of strength are inferiour to those of Brutes ; but by virtue of his Mind endued with Reason and Free-will. For Man presides not over the Beasts by virtue of what he hath in common with them ; but by that which distinguisheth him from them, and constitutes him the Image of God.

Lift up then, my Soul, lift up thy mind towards thy Pattern, and consider, that all the Excellency of an Image or Picture, consists in its Similitude with the Original. For if (for instance) the Original be deform'd and ugly, as that of the Devil is usually represented, the Excellency of the Transcript will be to resemble the deformity of the Original. So that deformity in the Original will continue so, but deformity in the Transcript will be Beauty. But if the Original be also beautiful,

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riful, the Picture will be precious indeed, if it come up, in good measure to the beauty of the Original, And could Sense be super-added to the Picture, it would desire nothing more earnestly, than to be ever looking upon the Original, to imitate its Behaviour, and become in all respects as like it as possible.

Now God, my Soul, is thy Pattern, who is infinite Beauty, and Light, in whom is no darkness, at whose brightness the Sun and Moon stand amaz'd. And that thou mayest with the greater ease transcribe the Beauty of so great an Original, that thou mayest desire to be like him, and attain thy desire, in which thing all thy Perfection, all thy Profit, all thine Honour, Joy, and Satisfaction, and, in one word, all thy Good consists; consider that the beauty of God thy Example, doth consist in Wisdom and Holiness. For as the beauty of the Body results from the Symmetry of the Members, and Amiableness of Colour; so in the spiritual Substance, Light of Wisdom is loveliness of colour, and Justice is proportion of Members. Now by Justice is not meant any particular Virtue, but that general one which comprehends all: Therefore that is the most beautiful Spirit, whose Mind is brighten'd with the Light of Wisdom, and whose Will is replenish'd with perfect Justice. Now God, O my Soul, who is thy Exemplar and Pattern, is Wisdom it self, Justice it self, and consequently Beauty it self. And because both Justice and Wisdom are in holy Writ signified to us, under the Name of Holiness, therefore the Angels in
Isaiah

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Isaiab cry unto God *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts.* And God himself calls unto his Images, *Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.* And in the Gospel our Lord commands, *Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

If therefore, my Soul, thou desirest to become the true Image of God, and nearly to resemble thy Pattern, thou must be in love with Wisdom and Justice above all other Things. True Wisdom is to judge of all things according to the highest Cause. The highest Cause is the Divine Will, or that Law which discovers the Will of God to Men. If therefore thou art in love with Wisdom, thou must take especial Care not to listen to the Dictates of the Law of Flesh; not to attend to the Judgment of the Senses; not to take thy Measures from the vain World, or the Advice of Relations, much less from the Suggestions of Flatterers. To all these thou must turn a deaf Ear, and only listen to the Will of thy Lord, and do thou always account, that what accords with the Divine Will and Law, is thy true Interest, and makes for thine Honour, and is on all Accounts good and desirable. This is the Wisdom of the Saints, of which the Wise Man gives this Account, *Wisdom 7. 10. I loved her above Health and Beauty, and chose to have her instead of Light; for the Light that cometh from her never goeth out, all good things come together to me with her.*

Now Justice, which is the other part of Spiritual Beauty, comprehends, indeed, all Virtues which adorn and perfect the Will, but especially Charity, which is the Mother and Root of all Virtues, of which St. *Augustin* in his

his Book of *Nature and Grace*, towards the end, thus discourseth. "Charity begun, is Justice begun; Charity improv'd, is Justice improv'd; compleat Charity, is compleat Justice. *For he that loveth, hath fulfilled the Law, because Love worketh no evil, and therefore Love, as the Apostle informs us, is the fulfilling of the Law.* And on the contrary, *he that keepeth his Word, that is, his Commandments, in him the Love of God is perfect, according to St. John 1 Ep. 1.* And therefore they who desire to be like their Pattern, should conform to St. Paul's Direction, *Eph. 5. Be Followers of God as dear Children, and walk in Love.* For the Son is the Image of the Father, and all the excellency of the Image (as has been already observ'd) is nearly to resemble the Original.

Could'st thou, my Soul, arrive at a clear understanding of these things, and being made like to thy Pattern in the Beauty of true Wisdom, and real Holiness, approve thy self to the King of Kings, what abundance of Peace wouldest thou enjoy! What Tides of Pleasure would still be flowing in upon thee! How easily wouldest thou slight all worldly Delights! And on the contrary, didst thou consider how highly God Almighty is provok'd, when he sees his Images unadorned with the Light of Wisdom, and the Beauty of Justice, to be sunk in the Mire and Puddle of Sin, and wrapp'd up in Darknes; when he beholds Man, who was so highly honour'd, as to be like God, to be now compar'd to, and like the Beasts that perish, thou wouldest be in an horrible Dread and Confusion, and never be at rest, 'till with Floods of penitential Tears,
issuing

issuing from an Heart truly contrite, thou hadst wash'd off all Stains and Defilements, and recover'd a likeness with thy most beautiful Pattern. But because in the mean time, whilst thou art absent from the Lord, and *walkest by Faith, and not by Sight*, thou standest in continual need of thy Lord's Assistance, both to retain that likeness thou hast already acquir'd, and that thou mayest every Day become more like him, that is, more bright and beautiful; sigh heartily unto God, and thus address thy self to him; O holy and most merciful Lord, who wert pleas'd to make this my Soul after thine own Likeness, perfect I most humbly beseech thee this thy poor Image, enlighten its Understanding, compleat its Justice, secure it in the secret of thy Tabernacle, that it may neither be defil'd with the Dirt of carnal Concupiscence, nor the Smoak of secular Honour, nor the Dust of worldly Cogitations.

C H A P. V.

IT remains now that we consider the last, which we term the Final Cause. Now the End for which Man was created, is no other than God himself. But there being a two-fold End, one Intrinsick, the other Extrinsick, we will briefly examine each apart. The Intrinsick End of every thing is such a State of Perfection as any thing is capable of attaining. The Intrinsick End of a Palace is the finishing and Perfection of the Palace, for we
then

then reckon it finish'd when it is in no respect deficient. The Intrinsic End of a Tree, is that state of perfection which its nature requires; for a Tree may then be said to have attain'd its end, when it spreads its Branches, produces Leaves, is beautified with Flowers, and laden with ripe Fruits. Man then, who is created for the highest End, may then be said to have attained his End, when his Understanding shall see God as he is, which vision shall be attended with universal Knowledge, and his Will shall enjoy that highest good it was so enamour'd on: And the Body being cloath'd with Immutability and Impossibility, and other glorious Endowments, shall be possess'd of everlasting Peace and Felicity. And since the very Essence of this final beatitude consists in the seeing of God, by which we the Images of God, shall be advanc'd to a state of Perfection, and an exact Similitude with our Divine Exemplar, therefore St. John says, † *Now we are the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know when he shall appear, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* † 1 Ep. 2.

Could'st thou, O my Soul, conceive what this means, *We shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is*; how quickly would all these Mists of earthly Desires vanish and disappear? God is infinitely happy, and that purely on this account, because he still beholds Himself as he is, and enjoys Himself who is the Supream Good, which he clearly sees, and most passionately loves, His desire is, that thou likewise should'st partake of
this

this inestimable Happiness. So much is
** Mat. 2.5.* intimated in these words, ** Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*; that is, come and be a sharer in that Joy, which is the Happiness of God himself. As also in that, *I appoint unto you a Kingdom, as my Father hath appointed me, that ye may eat and drink with me at my Table in my Kingdom*: That is, I will divide my Kingdom with you, and communicate that Honour, Power and Pleasure, which I and my Father enjoy. Now who can conceive how great his Honour, Power, and Pleasure is, who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, who is the Lord our God? Surely he that can raise his thoughts and expectations to such an height, as to have a right notion of this our End, will be ashamed to scramble for little parcels of Earth, to be disturb'd at the loss of perishing things, or to be transported for any worldly success and advantage; he would be ashamed I say, and blush, to pursue such pleasures as Beasts hunt after, who has the honour to be a companion of Angels, in amity with the great God, and to have a sure Title to the unspeakable Joys of Heaven.

CHAP. VI.

NOW the Extrinsic End of every thing is he, for whose sake a thing is design'd and made. The End of a Palace is the Person who inhabits it; the End of a Tree is the owner; the End of Man is only the Lord
his

his God. For God not only made Man, but made him out of Matter of his own, and for himself : it is He who furnishes him with all the Requisites of his Nature, and for a short imperfect Service, rewards him with Eternal Life. With good reason therefore may he thus enjoyn, * *Thou shalt worship the Lord* * Deut. 6. *thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* But observe, my Soul, and diligently attend. O-ther things which were created for Man, are serviceable to Man, not themselves. Ox-en labour and toil for their Masters, not themselves. Fields, Vine-yards, and Gar-dens, replenish Man's Cellars, Barns, and Pur-ses, not their own. Servants have the drudg-ery, sweat, and fatigue, the profit, ease, and pleasure accrue to their Masters. But thy gracious God, who stands not in need of any thing thou hast, doth indeed require Man's Service, but permits him that labours to reap the benefit of his Service.

O Gracious God, full of Mercy and Con-descention, who would not heartily serve thee, that is ever so little acquainted with the gentleness of thy Fatherly Government ? What is it that thou enjoynest thy Servants ? Thy Injunction is only this, *That they take thy Yoke upon them.* But what kind of Yoke ? Thou assurest them, *that thy Yoke is easie, and thy Burden light.* And who would refuse a Yoke which doth not pinch, and gall, but ease and refresh the Bearer ? Who would re-move his Shoulders from a Burthen, that doth not oppress, but support ? With good reason therefore didst thou add, *And ye shall find rest to your Souls.* And what is this Yoke

of thine, which imports no Fatigue but Refreshment? 'Tis only this, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart.* And what can we do with more ease, and greater satisfaction, than to be in love with Goodness, Beauty, and Beneficence, of which thou, my God, art wholly compos'd. And thy Servant Holy *David* doth truly affirm of thy Commandments, that *they are more to be desir'd than Gold, sweeter also than Honey, and the Honey-comb.* And as if all this were too little, he adds, *And in keeping them there is great Reward.* How is this, my God? Dost thou promise a Reward to the Observers of such Commandments, as are of themselves more desirable than Gold, and sweeter than the Honey-comb? Thou dost indeed promise one, and that a very noble Reward: For St. *James* tells us, that *God hath promis'd a Crown of Life to them that love him.* And what is this Crown of life which he hath promis'd? It is so transcendently great, that our Thoughts cannot reach the height of it. For thus saith St. *Paul* out of *Esaïas*, *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have enter'd into the Heart of Man, the things which he hath prepar'd for them that love him;* therefore in keeping the Commandments, there is great Reward. But it is not only that first and Great Commandment that is profitable to Man that obeys, not to God that enjoyns the observance of it; but all the other Commandments do improve, adorn, instruct, and ennoble the Obedient, and render him eternally Good and Happy. Wherefore, my Soul, if thou art wise, be ever mindful, that thou art created to the glory

Steps of Ascension to God.

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glory of God, and thine own eternal Salvation. Remember that this is thy End, the Centre of thy Soul, the Treasure of thy Heart. If thou shalt attain to this End, happy shalt thou be, but woe unto thee if thou fall short of it. Therefore account that thing to be really good, that helps to this End, and that to be really evil, which debars thee from it. Prosperity and Adversity, Riches and Poverty, Health and Sickness, Honour and Disgrace, are things which a wise Man will neither covet nor decline. If they promote the Glory of God, and thy Everlasting Happiness, they are good and desirable; if they obstruct them, they are evil, and thou oughtest to pray against them.

C 2 THE

THE Second Step.

*From the Consideration of the greater
World*

CHAP. I.

WE have made the first Step of the Ladder of Ascension from the Consideration of Man, who is call'd the lesser World : my Purpose is now to add a Second, from the Consideration of this huge Mass, which we commonly call the greater World. *St. Gregory Naz.* indeed tells us, that God placed Man as a great World in a less, which is true enough, if out of the World we exclude Angels; for Man is greater than the whole World of Bodies in Virtue, tho' not in Bulk. But if Angels are included in the World, as here they are, then Man is a little World placed in a greater. In this World then which comprehends the Universality of things, there are many things which are altogether wonderful, but what doth more especially call for our Admiration, is their Greatness, Multitude, Variety, Efficaciousness, and

Man

The World

Angels

This World

Steps of Ascension to God.

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and Beauty. All which being attentively weigh'd and consider'd (God enlightning the Eyes of our Understanding) will help us to a sight of a Greatness, Multitude, Variety, Power, and Beauty of such Immensity, that our Souls will be ravish'd into Transport and Extasy, in admiration of them, and when we shall sink to our selves again, we shall look upon all things, but God, as mean and inconsiderable.

The Earth, certainly, is vastly great, so great, that 'tis said *Ecclus 1. Who hath measured the breadth of the Earth, and the depth of Hell.* And its greatness may in some Measure be hence conceiv'd, that in the Flux of so many thousand Years from the Creation, the whole Surface (that the Wise Man calls the breadth) hath not yet been discovered to those who have made a diligent search after it; and I pray, what is the Bulk of Earth, compar'd with the Circuit of the highest Heaven? Astrologers make it (and with good reason) no more than a Point. For we see the Rays of the Sun, notwithstanding the interposition of the Earth, so to influence the Stars of the Firmament, as if the Earth were nothing at all. And if every Star of the Firmament (as Wise Men generally allow) is greater than the whole Globe of Earth, and yet these Stars appear to us very small, by reason of the great distance, who can conceive the vast extent of Heaven, in which so many Stars do shine? If then the Wise Man speaks of the Surface and Depth of the Earth, what would he have said of the exterior Surface of Heaven, and the Depth of the whole World from

Its greatness

*Bulk - 22
Heaven*

*Sun
Stars*

Steps of Ascension to God.

21

Metaphors

Similitudes

God every where

the highest Heaven to the lowest Hell? So very great is the Bulk of this World of Bodies, that no Thought or Understanding can comprehend it! Well then my Soul, if the World is so great, how great is he that made the World? *Great is the Lord*, saith the Prophet, *and of his Greatness there is no end.* Hear what *Esa-* as affirms of him, *He hath measured the Waters in the hollow of his Hand, and meted out the Heaven with a Span, and comprehended the Dust of the Earth in a Measure*, Esa. 40. 12. These, indeed, are Metaphorical Expressions, for God is a Spirit, and can't properly be said to have either Fingers or Span. By these Similitudes the Scriptures plainly intimate, that God is much greater than his Creature, which *Solomon* more expressly shews, when he says, *the Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens, cannot contain thee.* And the truth hereof is manifest; for were there another World created, God would also replenish it: were many, nay, infinite Worlds produc'd, God would fill them all. But do not imagine, my Soul, that God doth so fill the World, that a Part of him is in a certain Part of the World, and that he is whole in all the World, for God is without Parts, and is whole in the whole World, and whole in every part of it. Therefore he is every where present in his Omnipotency and Wisdom. If then thou art faithful to him, tho' an Army stood against thee, thy Heart needeth not to fear, nor be dismayed. For why should he fear any thing, who hath ready at hand a Father, Friend, and Spouse, that is All-mighty, All-seeing, and that most affectionately loves him? But if, by thy Crimes, thou hast pro-

vok'd

Steps of Ascension to God.

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vok'd God thy Judge, hast made thee an Omnipotent Enemy, from whom nothing is conceal'd, that abominates Sin, and will by no means clear the guilty, thou hast then all the reason in the World to be horribly afraid, never to be at rest and quiet, till by hearty Repentance thou hast reconciled thy self to God, and hast good assurance of Mercy.

C H A P. II.

BUT now who shall enumerate the Multitude of things created by one God, Maker of Heaven and Earth? *Who, saith Eccclus. shall count the Sands of the Sea, and the Drops of Rain?* But omitting these minute things, how many Metals are there of Gold and Silver, of Brass and Lead? How many precious Stones, Jewels, and Pearls, in the Bowels of the Earth and Sea? How many are the Genus's, Species, and Individuals, of Herbs, Shoots, and Plants, upon Earth, and how many are the Parts of each? How various are the Genus's, Species, and Individuals of perfect and imperfect, four footed, creeping, and flying Animals? What variety likewise in the Genus's, Species, and Individuals of Fishes in the Sea? Who is able to reckon them up? What shall we say of the Multitude of Mankind, concerning whom it is said, *According to thy Greatness hast thou multiplied the Sons of Men?* But to be brief, how many Stars are there in Heaven? Above the Heavens

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how many Angels? Of the Stars we read in the Scriptures indited by the Spirit of Truth, *Gen. 15. Number them if thou art able.* In the 22d Chapter of the same, he compares the Multitude of Stars with that of the Sand, which all Men allow to be numberless. Of the Angels Daniel thus writes, *Thousand of thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him.* And it is the Opinion of some, that the Multitude of Angels is greater than that of all material things. This Multitude of things then, which amounts to almost an Infinity, created by one Omnipotent God, plainly demonstrates to us, that infinite Perfections are resident in the Divine Essence. For God is pleased, in some measure, to discover himself to Man by his Creatures, but since no Creature can adequately represent the infinite Perfection of the Creator, he hath multiplied the Creatures, and imparted to each of them some degrees of Goodness and Perfection, that thence we might form a Judgment of the Creator's Goodness and Perfection, who comprises infinite Perfections, under the Perfection of one most simple Essence, much after the same manner, as a Piece of Gold contains the value of a great many Pieces of Brass or Copper Money. Therefore, my Soul, whatever thing presents it self to thine Eyes or Fancy, with a shew of something rare and wonderful, make use of it as a Step to advance thee to the Knowledge of thy Creator's Perfection, which incomparably is more great and wonderful. By this means it will come to pass that *the Creatures, which,* as the Wise Man saith,

Similitude

Steps of Ascension to God.

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faith, *are made a Trap for the Feet of the imprudent*, will not deceive, but instruct thee ; not be the occasion of thy Fall, but of advancing thee to a better State. When therefore Gold or Silver, or what is most valuable, offer themselves to thy view, say to thy self, my God is more to be valued, who has promised to be my Portion, on condition I slight and condemn these. If thou admirest the Kingdoms and Empires of this World, say in thine Heart, how much inferiour are these to the Kingdom of Heaven, which is everlasting, and which God, who cannot lie, hath promised to give them that love him ? If Pleasures and Delights assault thy carnal Sense, say in thine Heart, the Pleasures of the Spirit are much more joyous than those of the Flesh, and the Delights of the Mind, than those of the Belly ; for these are administer'd by a poor mortal Creature, the other by the Great God, the God of all Consolation. He that shall be so happy as to taste these, may say with the Apostle, *I am filled with Comfort, I am exceeding glad in all our Tribulation*. To conclude, if any thing, tho' never so fine and new, so rare, so great and wonderful, offer it self to thee, on condition to forsake God, answer boldly and say, that all the Good which is in the Creatures, is to be found with infinite advantage in the Lord thy God, that therefore it is not for thy Interest to exchange Gold for Copper, Jewels for Glass, Things of Weight and Moment for inconsiderable Trifles, and Things of Eternal Duration for those of a Momentary Continuance.

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q 2 Cor. 7. 4

CHAP.

C H A P. III.

BUT tho' the Multitude of created Things is admirable, and an Argument of the manifold Perfection of the One God ; yet the Variety which appears in that Multiplicity is more admirable, and more apt to bring us to the Knowledge of God. For there is no difficulty with one Seal, to make many Impressions exactly alike, nor in the same Mould to cast a World of Letters ; but to vary and change the Forms almost infinitely, as God hath done in the Creation, bespeaks a Work truly Divine, and calls aloud for Admiration. To speak nothing of the various sorts and kinds of things, which every one perceives to be strangely diversified. How great a Variety is there in the very Individuals of Herbs, Plants, Flowers, and Fruits ? Are not the Figures, and Colours, the Taste and Smell, almost infinitely various ? And don't we see the very same in living Creatures ? But what shall we say of Mankind, when in a very numerous Army, two Persons cannot be met with that are altogether alike ? Which is likewise observable in the Stars and Angels ; *for one Star differeth from another Star in Glory*, as St. Paul tells us in the former Epistle to the *Corinthians*.

Now lift up thine Eyes, my Soul, unto God, in whom are the Ideas of all things, and from whom, as from an inexhaustible Fountain, this wonderful Variety did spring. For God could

could not have impress'd those numberless Forms of things in the Creatures, had not the Ideas or Patterns thereof been in a most eminent and extraordinary measure in his Essence. With good reason therefore doth the Apostle cry out, *O the height of the Riches of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God!* Needs must that Well be infinitely deep, wherein those Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge lie, which could produce such an infinite variety of things. So that the holy Man illuminated from above, might very well say, *My God and all things!* For that variety of Goodness which we see distributed to, and divided amongst the Creatures, is all united more eminently in God. But, my Soul, thou art ready to reply, it may be what you affirm is true, but the goodness of the Creatures we see with our Eyes, we touch with our Hands, and taste with our Mouth, we really possess and enjoy; but as for God we neither see nor touch, taste nor possess him, and conceive him in our Thoughts as a thing at a great distance; it is therefore not to be wondred at, if the Creatures do more affect us than God. But, my Soul, if thou hast a lively and active Faith, thou canst not but grant, that when this Life ends (which passeth away like a Shadow) provided thou shalt persevere in Faith, Hope, and Charity, thou shalt see God truly, and clearly as he is in himself, and shalt have a more close and intimate enjoyment of him, than now thou hast of the Creatures. Hear what thy Lord himself affirms, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* Listen to what the holy Apostle says,
We

Steps of Ascension to God.

We see now in a glass darkly, but then face to face. Attend likewise to the beloved Disciple, We shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. Tell me now, my Soul, how much of this World is fallen to thy share? Thou canst not say a third, or fourth part, no, it is but a small and inconsiderable spot that thou art possess'd of, which in a little time, whether with, or against thy consent, thou shalt be forc'd to quit. But thou shalt possess God wholly, in whom are all things, and thou shalt possess him to all eternity, for God, as St. Paul saith, will be all in all. He will be thy Life, thy Food, and Raiment, Riches, Honour, Delight, and all. Besides thy gracious and indulgent God, expects not whilst thou art pilgrimizing in this World, that thou shouldst be altogether without the Comforts of the Creatures, so far from it, that he hath made them for thy use and service; only he requires, that thou shouldst use them with moderation and sobriety, that thou let the Poor and Needy partake with thee; that thou keep them under, and suffer them not to Lord it over thee; that thou use them after such a manner as may indear thee to the Donor. Consider therefore again, and again, whether it is not more for thy interest to have as much of this World, as is necessary, whilst here, and when remov'd hence, to have the fruition of thy Creator himself, in whom (as hath been often said) are all things, and that to all eternity; or to rise early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, to add house to house, field to field, and lade thy self with thick clay, and yet to be dissatisfied and uneasy, and at last to be stript of all temporal Enjoyments,

joyments, and fall short of the heavenly and eternal? Besides, God is not at such a distance from those that love him, but that he administers to them great consolation, even in this life, much greater than those, which they that dote on the World meet with in the Creatures. For it is truly affirm'd in holy Writ; *I thought upon God, and was comforted: Delight thy self in the Lord, and he shall grant thee the desires of thy heart.* Thus Psal. 86. 4. *Rejoyce the soul of thy Servant, for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my Soul.* And, not to take notice of other Places, when the Apostle saith, 2 Cor. 7. 4. *I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.* He doth not mean that Consolation springeth from Affliction, or Joy from Sorrow, for *Grapes proceed not from Thorns, nor Figs from Thistles*; no, his meaning is, that God vouchsafes those that love him, such sincere, pure, and solid Joys, to ease their Grievances, that the Comforts of this World are no ways to be compared with them. Therefore, my Soul, be fully assur'd, and conclude, that he who shall be so happy as to find God, doth with him find all things; that he who loseth God, hath lost all things.

C H A P. IV.

IT follows now that from the Power which God hath endowed the Creatures with, we advance to the infinite Power of the Creator. There is not any thing in Nature but is furnish'd with admirable Power and Efficacy.

cy. If a Quantity of Earth, or a Stone descend from an high, with what violence doth it fall? What can escape breaking that stands in its way? What is able to make resistance against it? When the Holy Ghost in the *Revelations* would describe the mighty violence, by which *Babylon* the great, that is, all the wicked, shall be thrown into Hell in the Day of Judgment, he tells us, 18. 21. *And a mighty Angel took up a Stone like a great Mill-stone, and cast it into the Sea, saying, thus with violence shall that great City Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.* Water, which is soft and pleasant, and flows gently upon the Surface of the Earth when it is intraged, and swells in Rivers or Brooks, it bears away all before it; nor have we seen it only destroy poor Hutts and Cottages, but Gates and Walls of Cities, and Bridges of Marble. The Winds, which sometime are calm and blow gently, do force huge unweildy Ships against Rocks, tear up old Oaks by the Roots, and tumble them down. I my self have seen that which related I would not have believ'd, *viz.* a huge quantity of Earth torn up by a very strong Wind, and carried to a Village, so that there remaind a very great Pit, whence the Earth had been forced, and that Village where it fell, was covered, and, as it were, buried with it. What shall we say concerning the Element of Fire? How suddenly doth a little Fire grow to such a Flame, that in a Moment it brings Houses, and Woods to nothing? *Behold, saith St. James, how great a matter a little Fire kindleth!* What variety of Virtues do Herbs contain? What admirable

Virtue

Steps of Ascension to God.

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Virtue is found in Stones, especially the Loadstone, and Amber. Amongst Animals, some we find to be very robust, and strong, as Lions, Bears, Bulls, and Elephants; some very ingenious and cunning, tho' very small, as Ants, Spiders and Bees. I forbear to speak of the Power of Angels, the Virtue of the Sun and Stars, which are at a great distance from us. How great is the Wit of Man, by which so many Arts have been invented, insomuch that we are often in doubt whether to assign a Superiority to Art, or Nature.

Lift up now, my Soul, the Eyes of thine Understanding to God, and consider how great Virtue, Power, and Efficacy reside in the Lord thy God, whom we find thus address'd in the Oracles of Truth; *Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the Gods?* Exod. 15. And the Psalmist says of him, *Who only doth great and wondrous things.* And the blessed Apostle calls him, 1 Tim. 6. 15. *The Blessed and only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.* For whatever Power the Creatures have, they derive it wholly from God, nor can they enjoy it longer than God is pleased to continue it. For who was the Cause that *Jonas* had no hurt from the Waves of the Sea, nor the Teeth of the Whale, but God? Who but God closed the Mouths of hungry Lions, and preserved *Daniel* from being their Prey? Who, but the same God, preserved the *Three Children* in the midst of a fiery Furnace? Who was it that said to the raging Wind, and stormy Sea, *Peace, be still*, and the Wind ceased, and there was a great Calm, but Christ, the true God? Now God who derives not his
Vir-

Virtue and Power from another, but whose Will is his Power, and such a Power as no one can resist, he is always furnished with infinite Power. And all the Power of Man compar'd with that of God, may not so properly be term'd small and inconsiderable, as none at all. For thus saith the Prophet *Isaiab, Ch. 40. 17. All Nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.* How egregiously then do they betray their Folly, who are afraid of the Creature, and stand not in dread of an Omnipotent God? Who rely on their own, or their Friends Power, and repose not their Trust in the All-mighty? *If God be for us, who can be against us; and if God be against us, who will be on our side?*

Therefore humble thy self, my Soul, if thou art wise, under the mighty Hand of God. Keep close to him by true Piety and Obedience, and be not afraid what Man, or Devil, or any Creature, can do unto thee. But if thou hast fail'd in thy Duty, and incurred the Divine Displeasure, give no Sleep to thine Eyes, 'till thou hast reconciled thy self to the Lord, for it is a dreadful thing indeed, *to fall into the Hands of the living God.*

CHAP. V.

IT remains now that we consider the Beauty of things created, concerning which the Royal Prophet hath said, *Thou hast made me glad through thy Works, Ps. 92. 4.* And certainly as all the Things which God hath made

made are good, so will he that carefully surveys them, find them to be fair and beautiful. But omitting others, we will only consider those things which all Men allow, and own to be taking. How great is the beauty of a flowry Mead, of a Garden neatly kept, of a pleasant Wood, of the Sea not ruffled with the winds; of the Air when serene and unclouded; of Springs, Rivers, and Cities; of the glittering Firmament beset with Stars, as it were with Jewels? How are we pleas'd with the beauty of Trees arrayed in their flowery Mantles, or bending under a load of fruit? With the various forms of Beasts, the flying of Birds, and the sportings of Fishes? What shall I say concerning the Beauty of the Moon and Stars, but especially of the admirably great, and bright beams of the Sun, whose influence animates, and cheers the whole Earth? But Men, to whom we address our selves, are taken with nothing so much as their own Beauty and Excellence. *Many* (saith the Preacher) *have perished through the Beauty of a Woman.* I have frequently seen, and lamented, Men of exquisite parts and ingenuity, so enamour'd on the Beauty of Women; and on the contrary, grave and honourable Matrons dote so madly, and extravagantly on the Beauty of Men, as to slight their domestick Affairs, to neglect their Children, Parents, yea Life it self, not only temporal, but eternal too. 'Tis well known what the Scriptures have recorded concerning *David*, *Solomon*, and *Samson*: of such Examples all Histories are full.

Now, my Soul, if so great Beauty is imparted to the Creatures, how great, dost thou
D imagin,

imagin, is the Beauty of their Creator? For none can give to another what he has not himself. And if Men being pleas'd with the brightness of the Sun and Stars, have mistaken those glorious Bodies for Gods; *Let them* Wisd. 13. *consider, saith the Wiseman, how much more beautiful he is who rules over them, for he who begetteth Beauty, hath founded all these.* Now the greatness of the divine Beauty not only appears evidently in this, that all the Beauty which is dispers'd amongst the Creatures, is united in a far greater degree in him; but in this also, that tho' he is invisible to us whilst we are at a distance from him, and is but imperfectly known to us by our belief of the Scriptures, and in the Glas of the Creatures, yet many Saints have been so passionately in love with him, as to retire from the World into Deserts and Solitudes, that they might contemplate him with more advantage. Of which number were holy *Mary Magdalene*, *Paul* the first Hermit, *St. Antony*, and many more whom *Theodoret* gives an Account of in his Religious History. Others leaving their Possessions, and all that was dear to them, have confin'd themselves to Religious Houses, and been subject to the Wills of others, that they might be at amity with God. Others have expos'd their Lives to the most dolorous Pain, to qualify themselves to behold this infinite Beauty. Hear the Profession of one of them, viz. *St. Ignatius* the Martyr in his Epistle to the *Romans*, "Welcome Fire and Cross, and the Fury of Wild Beasts: I value not the Breaking of Bones, nor pulling Limb from Limb, nor bruising me from Head to Foot, nor all the Tor-

Steps of Ascension to God.

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“Torments the Devil can inflict, so I may have
“the blessed Fruition of Christ. Now if divine
Beauty not yet seen, but only believ’d and ex-
pected, createth such a longing desire, what will
it do when the Veil is removed, and it shall be
seen as it is in it self? This will be the consequent
of it, we shall be so transported with the River
of that Pleasure, that we shall not be able to
look off it one Moment. Nor is it any wonder
that Angels, and blessed Spirits, do continu-
ally behold the Face of their heavenly Father,
and that such a Vision is attended with no
Irkfomeness or Satiety, when as God himself
hath been eternally satisfied in viewing his
own Beauty, and will be ever happy in that
Vision. Search, my Soul, for this Beauty, so-
licitously pursue it Night and Day, say with
the Prophet, *As the hart panteth for the water-* Psal. 42.
brooks, so panteth my Soul after thee, O God.
My Soul thirsteth for God, for the living God,
when shall I come and appear before him. Say
with the Apostle, *We are willing rather to be ab-* 2 Cor. 5
sent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.
Neither needest thou fear any Pollution by
being so much in love with this Beauty, for
the Love of divine Beauty is so far from defi-
ling our Hearts, that it refines and purifies
them. For very true is that which the holy
Virgin and Martyr, St. Agnes, affirmed, “I am
“in love with Christ, whose Mother is a Vir-
“gin, whose Father knows not Woman: my
“Love to him is chaste, my Embraces pure and
“holy, my Entertainments are Spiritual, and
“there’s no Carnality in the whole. But if
thou dost, indeed, long for the uncreated Beau-
ty of thy Lord, thou must do what the Apostle

subjoyns, *Therefore we labour, that whether absent or present we may please him.* If thou art pleas'd with the Beauty of thy Lord, be careful so to behave thy self, that he may have Pleasure in thee. When we shall happily arrive at the land of the living, and shall be enlightned with the brightness of his Presence, it will be impossible for us not to please. But in this State of Peregrination, it is hard not to be bemired in the filth, and puddle of Sin, for according to what St. *James* saith, *In many things we offend all.* And the Prophet *David* to inform us how few the number of those are, that are undefiled, hath declar'd this as a requisite to Happinels, *Blessed are the undefiled in the way.* Therefore if in this State of Absence and Pilgrimage thou art ambitious to please thy Beloved, thou must not account a bare Velleity sufficient, but as the Apostle advises, thou must *strive to please him*, thou must narrowly watch against those Spots, which are the blemish of the Soul: and if through inadvertency, or otherwise, any cleave to it, give thy self no rest till thou hast clearly wip'd them off. Do but behold poor Women, who are desirous to please their Husbands, how many Hours they spend in plaiting their Hair, beautifying their Face, and getting Spots and Stains out of their Cloaths, that they may appear lovely in the Eyes of a Mortal Man, who must shortly return to Dust and Clay. What then doth it become thee to do, that thou mayest look amiable in the Eyes of thine immortal Spouse, who is perpetually viewing thee, and who desires to find thee without spot and wrinkle?

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It imports thee no doubt to exert thy utmost endeavour to walk in Holiness and Righteousness before him, speedily and vigorously to remove all rubs and obstacles in thy way thereto; not to have regard to Flesh and Blood, nor to mind common Fame and Opinion, for it cannot be that we should at one and the same time please God and the World, according to that of the Apostle, *If I please Gal. 2. men, I cannot be the servant of Christ.*

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THE

THE Third Step.

CHAP. I.

WE have consider'd the World of Bodies in general: proceed we now to an Examination of the principal Parts thereof, and make them instrumental in carrying us up to the Creator.

Earth — The first that presents its self is the Earth, which tho' it hath the meanest Situation, and appears less than the other Elements, yet is not really less than the Water, but is in worth and Dignity superior to them all. Upon this account it is that we frequently read in holy Writ, that God made Heaven and Earth, as the principal Parts of the World, to which the rest are subservient: for he made the Heavens, as it were a Palace for Himself, and Angels: and the Earth a Palace for Men. *Psal. 115.* *The Heavens, saith the Psalmist, even the Heavens are the Lord's, but the Earth hath he given to the Children of Men.* Therefore you see the Heavens beset with bright Stars, and the Earth impregnated with variety of rich Metals, and precious Stones, abounding with Herbs, Trees, and Animals of divers kinds; but the Water to be stor'd only with Fishes; and

and Fire and Air to be almost empty, unfurnish'd Elements. But to omit these things, the Earth offers three things to our Consideration, which duly attended to, do naturally elevate our Minds to God.

In the first place, it is the most solid and firm Foundation of the Universe, without which Man could neither walk, nor sit still, nor dispatch business, nor, indeed, any ways subsist. *The Lord, saith the Psalmist, hath established the World that it cannot be moved; and he hath laid the Foundations of the Earth that it should not be removed for ever.* *Earth*
6
Psal. 93.
104.

Secondly, the Earth like an indulgent Nurse of Men, and other Creatures, constantly produceth Herbs, Corn, Grass, Fruits from Trees, and numberless things of like sort. For this account the Almighty gives; *Behold I have given you every Herb bearing Seed, which is upon the face of all the Earth, and every Tree in which is the fruit of a Tree yielding Seed, to you it shall be for Meat, and to all that live upon the Earth.* 2^d
Gen. 1.

Thirdly, the Earth furnishes us with Stones and Wood to build Houses, and helps us to Brass and Iron for various purposes, supplies us likewise with Silver and Gold, of which we coin Money, which is an Instrument that readily purchases for us all the Conveniences of Life. 3^d

Now that first Property of the Earth, viz. that it is a Place in which our Bodies rest, which they cannot do in any of the other Elements, is a Symbol of the Creator, in whom alone the Soul of Man can find a resting Place. "Thou, O Lord, saith St. Austin, hast created us for thy self, and our Heart

“ is restless ’till it centers in Thee. King Solomon, as much as ever Man, was in pursuit of Rest, by Dominion, amassing up Treasures, and contriving variety of Pleasures and Delights. He had a very spacious Kingdom, and that in a State of perfect Peace and Tranquillity, for as the Scriptures acquaint us,

1 Kings 4. *He had Dominion over all the Region on this side the River from Tophsah even to Assah, over all the Kings on this side the River, and had Peace on all sides about him.* Such besides was the vastness of his Wealth, that he maintain’d fourty thousand Stalls of Horses for his Chariots, and twelve thousand Horsemen. And we read that his Navy brought Gold from Ophir in such quantity, that Silver was of no account; that at Jerusalem the Stones in the Street were not more common than that. As for Pleasures he

1 King. 1. seem’d to have ingross’d them. We read that he was in love with many strange Women, that he had seven hundred Wives, Princesses, and three hundred Concubines. But hear him speaking for himself, Eccles. 2. *I made me great Works, I builded me Houses, I planted me Vineyards. I made me Gardens and Orchards, I planted Trees in them of all kinds of Fruit. I made me Pools of Water, to water therewith the Wood that bringeth forth Trees. I got me Servants and Maidens; and had Servants born in my House; also I had great Possessions of great and small Cattle, above all that were in Jerusalem before me. I gather’d me also Silver and Gold, and the peculiar Treasures of Kings, and of the Provinces; I got me Men-singers, and Women-singers, and the delights of the Sons of Men, as musical Instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increas’d more than all that were*

Steps of Ascension to God.

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were before me in Jerusalem, also my Wisdom remained with me, and whatsoever mine Eyes desired, I kept not from them. I with-held not my Heart from any Joy, for my Heart rejoiced in all my labour, and this was my Portion of all my labour. This account he gives of himself: and certainly, if Quiet and Satisfaction is to be met with here below, he could not have come short of it. He had Dominion, and Wealth, and Pleasures at command; and had a greater share of humane Wisdom, which is generally had in great esteem, than ever any Mortal was possess'd of: And to make all these relish the better, he enjoy'd, for a long time, an uninterrupted Peace.

Inquire we now whether in this Affluence of good things, he found Satisfaction, and could thence fill the Capacities of his Soul. I looked, saith he, on all the Works that my Hands had wrought, and on the Labour wherein I had wearied my self, and behold! all was Vanity and Vexation of Spirit, and there was no Profit under the Sun. Eccles. 2. Soloman, you see, found no Satisfaction amidst so great Riches, and Pleasures, Wisdom and Honours; nor indeed could he have attain'd it, tho' he had possess'd them in a much greater measure, for the Mind of Man is immortal, but these are vain and transitory things. The Soul is of an Immortal Angellick Nature; and a Soul capable of an everlasting Happiness, can never acquiesce in that which is but temporary. As therefore an Humane Body cannot rest in the Air, tho' never so spacious, nor in the Water, be it never so deep, because the Earth, and not those Elements, is its Centre; so the Soul of Man can never meet with rest in Aerial

X Psal. 73.

al Honours, nor in Riches, that have their Original from Earth and Dirt, nor in waterish, that is, unstable and muddy Pleasures, nor in the false Splendor of humane Knowledge, but must expect it from God alone, who is the Soul's Centre, the true, and only Place of rest. Well therefore doth the Father of Solomon cry out, *Whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is nothing in Earth I desire in comparison of thee. God is the strength of my Heart, and my Portion for ever.* As if he had said, I can meet with nothing either in Heaven or Earth, or in any other Creature under Heaven, or above Earth, which can procure me true Quiet and Happiness. Thou only, my God, art a firm and solid Rock to my Heart, in Thee, and none but Thee, can I find a resting Place; thou only art my Portion, mine Inheritance, mine All; the Universe, abstracted from Thee, is insignificant to my Ease and Happiness. And as Thou alone art the Giver of Rest, so the Rest thou conferrest, is not for a little time, but for ever; Thou alone, I say, conferrest Eternal Rest, all other things are insufficient to content me one day.

Art thou yet willing to acknowledge, my Soul, that God only is thy Rock, on which thou mayest securely rest; that other things are Vanity and Vexation of Spirit; that they are not Realities but Illusions, which do not comfort, but afflict, as being purchased with Labour, possessed with Fear, and lost with Grief and Lamentation? Therefore, my Soul, if thou art wise, slight all fading and transitory things, lest they involve thee in the same Ruine: abide constant and close to him who is the Rock of

Ages

Ages, and continues to Eternity. Lift up thy Soul to God on high, that it putrefy not on Earth. Learn true Wisdom from the Multitude of Fools, in whose Person the Wise Man thus speaks. *We have erred from the way of Truth, and the light of Righteousness hath not shined upon us. We have wearied our selves in the way of wickedness and destruction, and have gone in difficult ways, but the way of the Lord have we not known. What good hath Pride done us? what advantage have we from boasting of our Riches? All these things are passed away like a shadow, and we are consumed in our own naughtiness.* Wisd. 5.

C H A P. II.

BUT a firm and solid Rock in another respect, is a Symbol of the Lord our God; which the Wisdom of God hath explain'd to us in his Gospel, when he tells us, *That an house founded upon a rock remains unmoveable, tho' assaulted by rains from above, tho' winds beat upon its sides, and floods attack it in the foundation; but an house built upon the sand can stand none of these shocks, but is thrown down at the first battery, and that the ruine of that house is great.* Matth. 7. X

Thy House, my Soul, which consists of various Powers and Operations, as of Rooms for Lodging, and for Entertainment, if it be founded on God, as on a Rock, that is, if thou stedfastly believest on God, if thy whole Trust and Affiance is in him, if thou art rooted and settled in his love, so that thou canst say with the Apostle, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* be at ease and unconcern'd, for nei-

neither spiritual wickedness, which is above, nor the lusts of the flesh which are beneath us, nor our domestick Enemies, such as Friends and Relations, which give us a side-blow, with all their wiles and cunning shall never prevail against thee. Great, I own, is the power and subtilty of Spiritual Powers, but yet inferiour to the Power and Wisdom of the Holy Spirit, which presides over that House which is founded on God. The Flesh opposes the Spirit with all its might and main, and the lusts of the flesh do frequently worst the most valiant; but the love of God easily vanquisheth the love of the flesh; and the fear of God soon puts to flight the fear of the World. To conclude, a mans Enemies are those of his own House, which with their pernicious counsells inveigle Souls to participate with them in sin: but that Soul which is assured that it hath a Lord and Father, a Brother and Spouse, in the Court of Heaven, is not to seek how to condemn Friends and Relations, no, nor to hate them too, and can say with the Apostle, *I am assur'd that neither death, nor life, nor any other creature can separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* But wretched with a witness is that poor Soul, whose House being founded on the Sand, cannot long hold out, but must submit to ruine and desolation: for how can it otherwise be, whenas he believes a Lie, and relies upon a weak Reed, when he owns no other God but his Belly, or his Cash, and the smoke of Honour; all which things not only pass suddenly away, and come to nothing, but carry the Soul that adheres to them into everlasting destruction.

C H A P. III.

NOW another Property of the Earth consists in this, that like a kind Nurse it abundantly ministers Herbs, and other Fruits for the Support of Men, and the rest of Animals. But this very Property doth, as it were, hand us to the Creator, as to the only real and proper Nurse. For it is not the Earth, but God in it, that doth produce all good things: for thus saith the holy Spirit, by the Mouth of David, *Who maketh grass to grow for the Cattle, and herb for the Service of Man; and — All wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their Meat in due Season. That thou givest them they gather, thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good.* And our Lord in his Gospel, *Look to the Fowls of the Air, because they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into Barns, for your heavenly Father feedeth them.* And the Apostle tells us, *God left not himself without a witness, doing good from Heaven, giving Rain and fruitful Seasons, and filling our hearts with food and gladness.* Neither do these Passages contradict what we read in the first Chapter of Genesis, viz. *Let the Earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind.* For the Earth doth indeed bring forth Grass, and Trees that bear Fruit, but 'tis by virtue of that Power, which God hath endued them with, the Earth is but instrumental, not only in the Production and Conservation of these Trees, but

but in the increase also, and Supplies they furnish us with. Therefore *David* when he calls upon all Creatures to laud the Creator, summons also Fruit-Trees, and all Cedars: and the Three Children invite all things that grow upon the Earth, *to bless the Lord, to praise and magnify him for ever.*

Dan. 3.

Joh. 4.

And when all things in their way, do laud and praise God, how affectionately my Soul, art thou obliged to bless and praise him, for all the Benefits thou continually partakest of? acknowledging in them the invisible hand of God, distributing all things; and his Fatherly and unmerited Love, which is so far from being invisible, that it manifestly discovers it self, and is incessantly blessing thee from Heaven, and supplying all thy Necessities. But it is not enough to thy gracious God to do all this, unless he also produce in thee, as in his Spiritual Field, the most noble branch of Charity. For Charity, as the beloved Disciple informs us in his Epistle, is not of the World, but of God. But there proceeds from Charity, as from a divine and heavenly Tree, the beautiful and fragrant Flowers of holy Thoughts; the pleasant Leaves of such Words as tend to the Safety of Nations, and the Fruits of good Works, by which God is glorified, our Neighbour benefited, and Treasures laid up for our selves in Heaven.

But woe to them, who like the Beasts that have no Understanding, desire to have their fill of the Fruits of Earth; that greedily rake them together, and hoard them up, and never think upon, nor are thankful to, the

great

great Donor, whose Minds are like the Earth, which God hath curſed, which bringeth forth Thorns and Bryers. For what do ſuch Perſons entertain their Thoughts with, in whoſe Hearts God hath not diſſeminated the Seeds of chaſte Deſigns, but Fornications, Adulteries, Murders, Sacrilege, Thefts, Treacheries, and the like? What do ſuch belch out of their profane mouths, but Blaſphemies, Perjuries, abuſive Language, Hereſies, Railings, ſpiteful Reflections, falſe Testimonies, Lies, and the like? And laſtly, what Fruits do ſuch produce, but thoſe poiſonous ones, we told you before were in their Thoughts, and which are termed by the Apoſtle *the Works of the Devil*. Theſe are Thorns, which firſt prick the Minds of them that breed them, with Sorrows and diſmal Apprehenſions: that affect the Reputation, Body, and Mind of their Neighbours, with grievous, and many times irreparable Injuries, from which, many Miſchiefs and Inconveniencies are occaſion'd to others.

Gal. 6.

But, omitting theſe things: If thou, my Soul, art the Garden of the Cœleſtial Dreſſer, take eſpecial care that thou be neither overgrown with Thorns nor Bryers, but cheriſh with thy utmoſt care, the Tree of Charity, the Lillies of Chſtity, and Spikenard of Humility. Be far from entertaining a Thought; that theſe heavenly Branches of Virtues are owing to thy ſelf, and not to the Lord thy God, who is the Lord of Virtues, and the Inſpirer of holy Purpoſes. And when thy Fruits come to their full Growth and Maturity, do not ſacrifice to thine own Net, but acknowledge that all thou haſt is owing
to

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to him, and that all thy Abilities are from him.

C H A P. IV.

THere remains the last Commendation of Earth, viz. that it contains Gold, Silver, and precious Stones within its Bowels. But certainly the Earth cannot, by its own Power, produce such valuable things; no, we are oblig'd to him for them, who thus speaks by the Prophet, *The Silver is mine, and the Gold is mine.* O thou eternal Lover of Mankind! that thou shouldest not only please to create for the use of Man, Stones, Wood, Iron, Copper, Lead, and other Necessaries for building of Houses, and Ships, and for making several Instruments; but also Gold, Silver, and precious Stones for Ornament and Show! And if thou conferrest these things on them that are no more than Pilgrims in this Vale, and many times upon thine Enemies, and such as blaspheme thy Name; what wilt thou bestow upon thy Favourites, that laud and bless thy Name, and reign with thee in Heaven? Thou wilt not present them with some small pieces of Silver, and Gold, or a few Jewels of worth and value; but with that City of which the Apostle speaks in the *Revelations*, which he thus describes; *the building of the Wall was of Jasper, and the City was pure Gold, like unto pure Glass. And the foundations of the Wall of the City, were garnished with all manner of precious Stones, —and the twelve* gates

Hag. 2.

Rev. 21.

Steps of Ascension to God.

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gates were twelve Pearls. But notwithstanding this Description, we don't suppose that the City above [the heavenly *Jerusalem*] is built or adorned with Gold, Jewels, or Pearls, such as these we are acquainted with; for we know the Holy Ghost makes use of such Words in Condescension to our Weakness, who cannot conceive better or nobler things. But without all question, that City which is the Country of God's Elect, is far more excellent than the best this World can shew us, than a City of Gold or Jewels excels poor Hutts and Cottages, whose Materials are only vile Earth and Straw.

Lift up now, my Soul, the Eyes of thy Mind to Heaven, and consider how highly the Good things of that Place are to be priz'd, whenas Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones, which the World so dotes upon, compared with those, are not computed at the rate of Dirt and Stubble. Consider further, that Gold, Silver, and Pearls, which are in such Esteem and Vogue, are subject to Corruption; but the Glories of that Cœlestial City are Incorruptible and Eternal. But if, by the hands of thy poor Brethren, thou hast an heart to transfer this perishing Gold, and Silver to the heavenly *Jerusalem*, (which if thou art wise thou wilt surely do) they shall become incorruptible, and be thine for ever.

For he that is Truth it self hath said, *Sell* Matth. 19.

what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and in another place,

Sell your possessions and give alms, make you bags Luke 12.

which wax not old, a treasure that faileth not in heaven, where no thief approacheth, nor moth cor-

E

rupteth.

rupteth. O the Incredulity of the Children of Men! Vain Man promiseth ten for an hundred, with a return of the principal, and easily finds Credit. God, who cannot lie, promises to him that gives an Alms, a Treasure in Heaven, yea, an hundred for one, and

Matth. 19 Life Eternal into the Bargain; Man boggles, and can hardly be brought to trust, and rather inclines there to hide his Treasure where Moth corrupteth, where Thieves break thro' and steal, than to lay it up in Heaven, where no danger approacheth. But admit there were no Thieves to plunder, nor Moth, nor Rust to corrupt, whose at last, wretched Man, will these things be, which thou hast purchased with so much Toil, and settest so strict a guard about? thine certainly they shall not be, though they might, hadst thou conveyed them amongst the Treasures of Heaven by the hands of the Poor. Experience sufficiently convinceth us, that the Goods which rich Misers have hoarded up, fall into the hands of prodigal Heirs, who squander them away in a much shorter time, than their greedy Parents had rak'd them together: and in the mean time, the Sin of Covetousness remains, and ever will, and the Worm of Conscience

✕ Isa. 6. 6. will not die, and the Fire of Hell will never be extinguished.

✕ Matth. 9.

Therefore, my Soul, be instructed by other Mens Follies, and attend to the Advice of thy Lord and Master; *Take heed and beware of Covetousness, for a mans life consisteth not in the abundance of those things which he possesseth.* The covetous Man rakes and scrapes, and carefully keeps, that he may have subsistence for a long time,

time, but his Project fails, for before he's aware, Death sends him a Summons, and his Riches, which he had so industriously got together, and so carefully preserved, beget a Worm which will never die, and kindle a Fire that will never go out. O miserable Wretch, thus solicitously to pile up Treasures, only to add Fuel to infernal Fire, and thereby render it unquenchable ! Observe what St. James advises in the close of his Epistle. *Go to now ye* James 5: *rich Men, weep and howl, for the miseries which shall come upon you. Your Riches are corrupted, and your Garments moth-eaten, your Gold and Silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. You, saith St. James, because you are rich, are accounted happy, and complemented as so ; but in very deed you are wretched, and miserable, yea, more wretched than the Necessitous themselves, and have reason to lament, and howl, for the Vengeance that is ready to overtake you. For those superfluous Riches, which you have kept under guard, and have permitted to be devour'd by Rust, whenas you ought to have dispers'd them amongst the Poor ; and the spare Garments which you have chosen to be eaten by Moths, rather than be made a covering for those that were cold and naked ; and your Gold and Silver, which you have suffered to be devoured by Canker, rather than exchang'd for Bread for the Hungry ; all these, I say, will exhibit severe Evidence against you, in the Day of Judgment. The Moths, with the Rust of your Riches, shall be converted into vehement Fire, which shall everlastingly devour your Flesh, and*

never consume it, that the Fire may be unquenchable, and your Anguish without Remedy. Therefore, tho' the vain World calls them happy who have Riches in Possession, let us conclude with the Royal Prophet, *That they, and only they, are happy, whose God is the Lord.*

THE

T H E

Fourth Step.

*From the Consideration of Waters,
especially of Fountains.*

C H A P. I.

WA T E R, another of this World's Elements, is next in Dignity to Earth: which likewise, duly consider'd, will furnish a second Step of Ascension. And first we will consider Water in general, and then from Fountains infer a special Ascension to God.

Water is moist and cold, and hence hath five Properties; for it washeth, and takes off Spots, extinguisheth Fire, cools and mitigates the heat of Thirst, unites many and different things, and lastly, ascends as high as it descends. All these are manifest Symbols, or Representations of the universal Creator. Water washeth corporeal Spots, God washeth the foulness of the Soul. *Thou shalt wash me, saith David, and I shall be whiter than Snow.* For though Contrition, Sacraments, God's Ministers, Alms, and other Works of Piety, do wash

Psal. 51.

wash the Pollutions of the Heart, I mean Sins; yet all these are but Instruments, and Preparatives, the whole Work of Purification must be ascrib'd to God, as to the sole Author thereof. *I, even I, saith God by Esaias, am He that blotteth out thy Transgressions for mine own sake.* And therefore the Pharisees that said with Indignation, reflecting upon Christ, *Who can forgive Sins but God alone?* were under no Mistake in attributing the Power of Remission thereof to God alone; but in their not believing him to be God; and hence there happen'd a mixture of Truth and Blasphemy.

John 7.

Nor doth God only wash the Defilements of the Heart, after the Similitude of Water, but is also pleased to be termed Water. For *St. John thus writes, He that believeth on me, as the Scripture saith, out of his Belly shall flow Rivers of living Water. But this he spake of the Spirit, which they should receive who believed on him, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.* Therefore the Holy Spirit, who as he is God, is also living

Ezek. 36.

Water, and of this Water Ezekiel speaks, *I will pour upon you clean water, and ye shall be cleansed from all your filthiness.* And because that Celestial, uncreated Water, far surpasses the Virtue of this Earthly created Water, I cannot therefore but take notice of the different Effects of one, and the other, in three Respects.

This Elementary Water washeth off bodily Spots, but not all, for many will not yield to it, unless assisted with Soap, and such Applications. The Supernatural Water leaves not so much as one Spot behind it; for thus we read in the now cited Place, *And ye shall*

be cleansed from all your filthiness. Created Water doth rarely so thoroughly take off Spots, but that some print or shadow remains; Uncreated Water doth so purify, that what is wash'd therewith becomes more white, and beautiful, than it was in its Native Purity. *Thou shalt wash me,* saith David, *and I shall be* Psal. 51. *whiter than Snow.* And the Lord greets us thus comfortably by *Esaiah, Tho' your Sins* Esaiah 2. *be as Scarlet, they shall be white as Snow; though they be as Crimson, they shall be as Wool.* Created Water, (to give one Instance more) washeth away natural Stains, which offer no Resistance to the Cleanser; Uncreated Water washeth away voluntary Spots, which yet are not done away, unless the Soul concur to its own cleansing. But so admirable is the Power of this Supernatural Water, that it insensibly sinks into stony Hearts, and therefore the hardest cannot reject it, because it forceth its way, as St. *Augustin* very well observes. "Who can comprehend, saith he, in what a wonderful manner thou inspirest Faith into the Hearts of Unbelievers, infusest Humility into the Hearts of the Proud, and insinuatest Charity into the Breasts of thine Enemies, insomuch that he who a little before did breath out Threatnings and Slaughter, and persecuted thee in thy Disciples, being on a sudden chang'd into another Man, could quietly hear the Threatnings, and patiently endure the Slaughters of Persecutors for the Sake of thee, and thy Church. It is far out of my reach to dive into the bottom of these Secrets, and I had rather experience, than curiously inquire into the

"Efficacy of thy Grace. And since I am
 "assur'd that this Water of thine is a volun-
 "tary Rain, set apart for thine Inheritance,
 "as thy holy Prophet hath declar'd ; there-
 "fore I most humbly beg that I may be
 "found amongst thine Inheritance, and that
 "it would please thy Grace to descend into
 "the Soil of my Heart, that it may not con-
 "tinue dry, and barren, as a Land that hath no
 "Water, such as it naturally is of it self, be-
 "ing unable so much as to think a good
 "Thought.

CHAP. II.

ANother Property of Water is, that it ex-
 tinguisheth Fire ; and the Cœlestial
 Water, that is, the Grace of the Holy Spirit,
 in a wonderful manner extinguisheth the Fire
 of carnal Concupiscence. To suppress this
 Fire, Fasting and Mortification are requisite,
 but, they become so by being instrumental
 to the Graces of the Divine Spirit, without
 which they signify little. For Love is the
 principal of the Affections and Perturbations
 of the Mind ; this directs all, and all of them
 readily obey. Love admits of no constraint,
 if it find not access on one side, it will force
 its way on another. Love fears nothing, no
 Enterprize is too hazardous for it, it is vi-
 ctorious in every Attempt, and in a word,
 a lesser Love yields only to a greater, and
 more powerful Love. This is the Case
 with carnal Love, whether it pursue the Plea-
 sures

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 it self

tures or Profits of this World, it submits only to the Love of God. No sooner doth the Water of the Holy Spirit begin to bedew the Heart of Man, but carnal Love abates, and grows cool. To this St. *Augustin* attests, who having been accustom'd to give up the Reins to his Lusts, and thought it impossible to rest satisfied without the Society of a Woman; as soon as the Grace of the Holy Spirit descended into his Heart, and shed its Influence upon it, he was convinc'd of his Mistake, and breaks out into this holy Rapture, at the beginning of his Book of Confessions. "How pleasant and delightful, all of a sudden, is it become to me to abstain from worldly Pleasures and Delights! it is now the Joy of my Heart to quit those Pleasures, which I was once afraid to lose. For thou, my God, who art Delight in Perfection, didst dispossess them, and succeededst in their room, sweeter than all Pleasure, but not to Flesh and Blood; clearer than all Light, yet more reserv'd than any Secret; more sublime than all Honour, but not to them who are high in their own Conceits.

H. Spirit

CHAP. III.

ANother Property of Water is, that it quenches Thirst; and nothing but this supernatural Water can free Men's Hearts from those many anxious and tormenting Desires they are continually haunted with, as Truth it self, in a Discourse with the Woman of *Samaria*

John 4. *maria*, plainly tells us ; *He that drinks, saith Christ, of this Water shall thirst again, but he that shall drink of the Water which I shall give him, shall never thirst.* Even so it is, the Eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the Ear with hearing. The best things the World presents Men with, fall short of Satisfaction : For the Soul is capable of an infinite Good, but created things have narrow Bounds and Limits. But he that hath tasted the Cœlestial Water, finds plenary Satisfaction, and therefore confines all his Desires and Longings to that. But of this we have spoken before, when we discours'd of the Centre of Quiet and Happiness, and fixt it in God alone.

CHAP. IV.

ANother Property of Water is, to conjoyn and unite such things as seem incapable of Incorporation ; thus many Grains of Meal, by the intermixture of Water, are made one Bread ; many Crumbs of Earth, by the Cement of Water, become Bricks. But with far more ease, and with much greater strength and firmness, this Cœlestial Water causeth that there shall be but one Heart, and one Soul, in a multitude of Men, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, concerning the Primitive Christians, on whom the Holy Ghost had lately descended. But our Lord a little before his Ascension to his Father, did both command, and foretell this Unity, which is effected by the water of the Holy Ghost ;

Acts 4.

Neither

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also *Joh. 17.*
 which shall believe on me through their word, that ^{21. 22.}
 they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and
 I in thee, that they also may be one in us. And a
 little after : That they may be one, even as we are
 one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be
 made perfect in one. To which Unity the A-
 postle exhorts us in his Epistle to the Ephesians,
 Be careful to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the bond *Ephes. 4.*
 of Peace. One Body and one Spirit, as ye are cal-
 led in one hope of your calling. O blessed U-
 nion, which maketh many Men to be one
 Body of Christ, which is govern'd by one
 Head, and eats of the same Bread, and drinks
 of one Cup, is animated by one Spirit, and
 keeping close to God, becomes one Spirit
 with him ! What more can a Servant desire,
 than that he should not only partake of all
 his Master's Goods, but by a band of insepa-
 rable Love, should become one with his Om-
 nipotent, All-wise, and Glorious Lord ? But
 this is brought about by the Grace of the Ho-
 ly Spirit, as by living, and enlivening Water,
 when it is devoutly received in the Heart,
 and there carefully cherish'd and industriously
 improv'd.

CHAP. V.

THE last Property we assign'd to Wa-
 ter is, that it ascends as high as it de-
 scended. And because the Holy Spirit de-
 scended from the highest Heaven to Earth,
 therefore to that Man, in whose Heart he is
 inter-

H. Spirit

Joh. 4. 14. tained, he becomes a *Fountain of Water springing up to Life everlasting*, as our Lord saith to the Woman of *Samaria*; which is, as if he had said, A Man who is born again of Water, and of the Holy Spirit, and behaves himself reverently and decently towards the Spirit; that heavenly Guest takes up his Residence in his Heart, and will never leave him, till he has secur'd his Title to that Place, whence Grace descended.

Therefore, my Soul, being instructed and encouraged by these Words of sacred Writ, still say to thy heavenly Father, with Sighs that cannot be uttered, vouchsafe to give me this Water to cleanse thee from all Spots and Impurities, to extinguish the heat of concupiscence, to allay the thirst after worldly Trifles and Vanities, to make thee one Spirit with thy God, and become a Fountain of living water, springing up to eternal Life, that thou mayest lay up Provisions in those Regions above, where thou hopest to take up thy eternal Residence. It was with

Luke 11.
13.

good reason the Son of God said; *If ye being evil, know how to give good things to your Children, much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Ghost to them that ask him.* He did not say, he will give you Bread, or Raiment, or Wisdom, or Charity, or the Kingdom of Heaven, or Eternal Life; but he will give the Holy Spirit, because they who have such a Present, are abundantly supplied with all things. Therefore cease not to put the Father in mind of the Son's Promise, and to offer such an Address as this, with the greatest Affection, and fullest Assurance of being heard; O Holy Father,

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Steps of Ascension to God.

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Father, I present not my Petitions unto thee, trusting to mine own Righteousness, but to the Promise of thine only begotten Son, who, to encourage us to make our Requests known unto Thee, was graciously pleased to say, *How much rather shall your Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* Thy Son, we are assur'd, is Truth, and cannot impose upon us, make good therefore the Promise of thy beloved, who hath glorified thee upon Earth, and extended his Obedience to thee unto Death, even the Death of the Cross. Give the Holy Spirit to thy humble Petitioner, give the Spirit of Fear and Love towards thee, that thy Servant may know no other Fear or Dread, but of incurring thy Displeasure; that he may love nothing but Thee, and his Neighbour for thy sake. *Create in me a clean Heart, O God, and renew a right Spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy Presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me; restore unto me the Joy of thy Salvation, and stablish me with thy Free Spirit.*

John 12.
Philip. 2.
8.
Hosp
Psal. 51.
10. 11. 12.

CHAP. VI.

Proceed we now to the Resemblance and Similitude which the Fountains of Water bear to God Almighty, from whence the Mind will be enabled to contemplate very wonderful things, suggested to us from the Creator's Perfections. For, without doubt, there is reason, why God in Holy Writ is called *the Fountain of Life, the Fountain of Wisdom,* and Ps. 36. 9.

- Jer. 2. 13. *a Fountain of living Water.* That he is the Fountain of Essence, is inferr'd from the Words of God himself to *Moses, Exodus 3. I am that I am. I am hath sent me unto you.* All which the Apostle seems to comprehend, when he saith, *In him we live, and move, and have our Being.* For we are in him as in the Fountain of Essence, and in him we live, as in the Fountain of Life, and in him we move, as in the Fountain of Wisdom. Because *Wisdom is more moving than any motion; she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness.*
- Acts 17. 28.
- Wis. 7. 24.

A Fountain of Water with us hath this Property, that it gives birth to Rivers, and that these no longer run, than that flows upon them; but the Fountain has no dependence on the Rivers, because it deriveth not its Waters from them, but hath them in it self, and communicates them with others. This is a lively Symbol and Note of the Divinity. For God is, in a most proper Sense, the Fountain of Essence, as receiving Being from none, and imparting it to all. Not any thing could give Being to God, since Being is from the Essence of God, and Essence it self is his Existence, so that it can neither be, nor be conceiv'd, that God hath not ever been, nor that he doth not always exist. Other things may for a time be, and not be, because Being doth not necessarily appertain to their Essence. For Instance, it is Essential to Man that he be a Rational Creature, and if it were Essential to him likewise to exist, he could not but always exist, but because Existence is not of his Essence, therefore he may exist, and not exist.

xist. God therefore is the Fountain of Being, because his Essence actually includes perpetual Existence. And so much these Words import, *I am that I am*: that is, I am Being it self, and derive not my Being from another, but have it in my self: it agrees to me alone, that Existence is Essential. From hence it is, that Eternity and Immortality are proper to God, according to that of the Apostle, *1 Tim. 1. Unto the King eternal, immortal*, and in another Place, *Who only bath Immortality*. But other things receive Being from God in such a precarious manner, that longer than they depend on him, and are supported by him, they cannot subsist. On this Account it is, that the same Apostle says of him, *That He beareth all things by the Word of his Power*. For were not the Creation supported and upheld by God, it would come to Ruine and Confusion in a Moment.

Admire therefore, my Soul, and adore the Infinite Goodness of the Creator, who so graciously supports, and preserves all things, when he stands not in any need of their assistance: and let the Patience of the same Creator be equally thy Wonder, and propose him to thy Imitation, who is so *kind* Luk 6.35. *bath to the unthankful and evil*, as to maintain those who blaspheme him, and to continue those in being, that deserve to be reduced to nothing. Think it not therefore any hard Imposition, when thou art commanded to bear with the Infirmities of thy Brother, and to return acts of Kindness for Hatred and Persecution.

But

But the Excellency of the Fountain of Being consists not only in this, that it receives not its Being from another Fountain, and in communicating Being to other things. For the Waters of Fountains, and those of Rivers are of the same kind; and tho' Fountains derive not their Waters from other Fountains, yet they have Causes of their Being, which are Vapours, and these again have their Causes, and so on till we ascend to the prime Cause, which is God. But, my Soul, it is not with God thy Creator, as with the Creatures, he is distinguish'd from them by infinite Degrees of Honour, Nobility, and Excellence, and is truly and properly the Fountain of Being, because he doth not only not derive his Being from another Fountain of Being, but knows no Cause at all. A Fountain of created Water, as you have been told, proceeds not from other Water, but from another Cause. The uncreated Fountain of Being finds nothing before it self, depends on nothing, stands in need of nothing, is in no danger of receiving damage from another: but on the contrary, all things have their sole dependence on God, and He, as *Judas Maccabeus* affirms, can becken the whole Creation into Destruction, *2 Mac. 8. 18.*

Admire thou, my Soul, and be enamour'd on this Excellency, this Beginning without Beginning, this Cause without a Cause, this infinite, unconfind, immense, and indispensable necessary Essence; for all other things compar'd with this are merely fortuitous and contingent. And perhaps 'tis this which

uk 10. Truth it self means, when he says, *One thing*

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is necessary. Therefore keep close to him, and faithfully serve him; delight thy self in loving, and longing for him; let all other things appear to thee what they really are, vile and despicable in comparison of him, and let no consideration touching them ruffle and discompose thee, seeing one thing is necessary, and that sufficient for thine, and all other Exigencies: but let thy main Concern be, never to fall from his Grace; and to endeavour to please him, and him alone, at all times, and in all Places.

C H A P. VII.

NOW God is properly call'd the Fountain of Life, because he liveth, and hath Life in himself, yea, he himself is Life Eternal. *This is, saith St. John, 1. Ep. 5. the true God, and Life Eternal,* and all things that live, receive their Life from that Fountain, and when he withdraws his vital Influences, they die, and return again to their Dust, as the sweet Singer of Israel tells us *Psalms 104. 29.* To beget their like is proper to the living, but God begets a Son exactly like himself, *i. e.* God, and living. *For as the Father hath Life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have Life in himself,* as St. John testifies in his Gospel. *Joh. 5. 26.* But the Father hath Life in himself, because he is the Fountain of Life, and is not owing to another for it; and he hath given to the Son to have Life in himself, because he hath communicated the same Life, which he himself hath; and hence also the Son is the Fountain

tain of Life, but a Fountain derived from a Fountain, as he is *God of God, and Light of Light*. Who can declare, nay, who can conceive, what the Life of God is, and what that Fountain of Life is, from whose droppings Life is convey'd to all the Living both in Heaven and Earth?

The Life we are acquainted with in this our State of Exile, is nothing else but an inward Principle of Motion, for those things are said to live, which do some way or other, move themselves. From hence it is, by way of Similitude, that the Waters in Rivers are called Living, and those in Ponds, Dead, because those seem to have motion in themselves, these stir not, unless forc'd by Winds, or some external Violence.

Thy God, my Soul, most truly lives, and is the Author and Fountain of Life. For thus we frequently read in the Holy Scriptures, *I live saith the Lord*. And the Prophets often repeat, *the Lord liveth, the Lord liveth*. And in the Prophet *Jeremy*, the Lord thus complains of his People, *They have forsaken me the Fountain of living Waters*. Yet for all this he is neither moved by himself, nor by another; *I am the Lord saith he, and am not changed*; and in another Place, *God is not the Son of Man that he should be changed*. In the Ecclesiastick Hymn 'tis also sung,

Jer. 16.

Mal. 3. 6.

O God the World's first beauteous Frame,
And Vigour last, 'cause Thou'rt the same.
And we Time's constant Changes see,
Because there is no Change in Thee.

Altho

Altho' God begets a Son, he doth it without any Change: tho' he sees, hears, speaks, loves, compassionates, judges; he doth all this without Change. Tho' he creates, and preserves, or on the contrary, destroys, and throws things back into their Original State, and again renews, and alters, yet in his Operations he is quiet, and continues unmov'd when any Change is brought about. How then (will you say) doth he live, if he moves not himself? And how can he but live, if he is the Spring and Source of Life? This Knot is easily loos'd; for it is a certain Argument of Life, if a thing act of it Self, and is not mov'd by Another. But Life, for the most part, in the Creatures, is an internal Principle of Motion, because they stand in need of many things, that they may exercise the Functions of Life. But God is Infinite Perfection, and furnish'd with all things from himself, therefore he acts indeed of himself, and is not mov'd by another, and Change and Motion are to him no Requisites. Created things stand in need of Change, that they may generate, and be generated, as generating from without themselves, and that which is begotten must be changed to Being, from not Being. But God begets a Son within Himself, and within Himself produceth the Holy Ghost, but neither Son, nor Holy Ghost, have need to be chang'd from not being to being, because they receive that Being which always was, and they receive it not in Time but Eternity. Created things need the Motion of Augmentation, because they are born with

Imperfection, but God the Son is born with absolute Perfection, and God the Holy Ghost is produc'd with the same. Created things need the Motion of Alteration, that they may attain several Qualities, which their Being requires; but God needs it not, having Essence of Infinite Perfection. Created things need Motion to go from Place to Place, because they are not in all Places, but God is whole and compleat every where. Besides, the Creatures to be enabled to see, hear, speak, and work, have need of several Helps, and Assistances, because their Life is imperfect, and necessitous; but God needs no adventitious Aid to see, and hear all things, to speak to all, and to work all, and in all, because he not only hath Life, but a compleatly perfect, and happy Life.

And to instance in the Act of Seeing. In order to exercise this Sense, a Man must have a visive Faculty distinct from the Soul, which properly lives; there must be an Object, *i. e.* a colour'd Body, plac'd without himself; there must likewise be the Light of the Sun, or some luminous Body; there must be a *Medium*, *i. e.* a transparent Body; there must be a sensible Species, which must reach from the Object to the Eye; there must be a Bodily Organ, *i. e.* an Eye furnished with various Humours, and fleshy Tunicles; there must be Sensitive Spirits, and Optick Nerves, by which the Spirits may have Passage; there must be a proportionate distance, and the Application of the Faculty. Behold what Assistances Men, and other Creatures, need to perform one vital Action! But God, in whom

whom all Light is center'd, stands not in need of any thing. His Infinite Essence is to him Faculty, Object, Species, Life, and all things else. God of Himself, by, and in Himself, discerns all things that are, have been, or shall be, and knows distinctly whatever can be. Yea, before the World was, God saw all things, neither was any Addition made to his Knowledge, or Vision, by the Creation.

What wilt thou be, my Soul, at that time, when thou shalt partake of this Life? What hard thing doth God enjoyn thee, when he commands this corporeal, and animal, this necessitous imperfect Life, to be expos'd for thy Brethren, or for the Cause of himself, in order to an exchange for an eternal, glorious, and perfectly happy Life? And if he deals not severely with thee, in bidding thee set so small a Value upon Life, what an easy and light thing should it seem, when he commands us freely to bestow our Riches, which are but dead, and senseless Clay, on the Poor; to abstain from fleshly Lusts; readily to renounce the Devil, and the vain Pomps of this World; to long for, and pant after that Life, which is the only real, and true Life?

But 'tis high time now to advance, as well as we can, to the Fountain of Wisdom. The Fountain of Wisdom is the Word of God on High, saith *Ecclesiasticus*. And 'tis well, and significantly said, on High, because the Fountain of Wisdom doth in a copious, and plentiful measure flow upon holy Angels, and the Spirits of just Men made perfect: but

that which falls to our share, who wander in a Wilderness, and are in a State of Exile, may rather be call'd a Vapour from, or Shadow of Wisdom, than Wisdom.

Wherefore, my Soul, consider what Inquiries become thee; pry not into things too high for thee, and above thy reach. Attempt not to find out Majesty to Perfection, lest thou should'st be overwhelm'd with its Glory. Admire the Wisdom of him, of whom the Apostle speaks, *To the only wise God.* Congratulate those blessed Souls, that drink at the Fountain of Wisdom; who, tho' they cannot comprehend God, which is only proper to the Fountain of Wisdom to do, yet they behold the Face of God, *i. e.* the first Cause, without a Veil, and being enlightned with his brightness, they make a right Judgment of all things. Neither in that Meridian Light of Wisdom, do they fear any Night of Error, Obscurity of Ignorance, or Mist of Opinion. Aspire to, and pant after this happy State, and that thou mayest safely attain to it, love the Lord

Rom 6. Jesus with all thy Soul, *in whom are hid all the Treasures of the Knowledge and Wisdom of God.*

Colof. 2.3. For he hath said in his Gospel, *He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest my self unto him.* And what do these Words import, *I will manifest my self unto him*, but this, I will make a Discovery of all the Treasures of the Knowledge and Wisdom of God, which are lodged in me. There is implanted in every Man's Nature, a Desire of Knowledge, and tho' in most, the Lusts of the Flesh have stifled this Desire, yet when we shall be divested of this corrupti-

John 14. 21.

ble Body, which cloggs, and depresses the Mind, then this Desire shall more visibly appear, and burn with greater Ardour, than all other Desires. How great, my Soul, will thy Portion of Felicity then be, when He whom thou lovest, and of whom thou art beloved, shall shew thee all the Treasures of the Knowledge and Wisdom of God? But that thou mayest not be frustrated of so great Hope and Expectation, be careful to keep the Commandments of Christ; for he himself hath said, *If any one love me, he will* John 14. *keep my Saying, and, he that loves me not, keep-* 21. *eth not my Sayings.* And in the mean time let that be thy Wisdom which holy *Job* describes, when he saith, *The Fear of the Lord* Job 28. *that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is Under-* 28. *standing.* And whatever Goodness thou findest in the Creatures, be assured that it descends from God the Fountain of all Goodness, that so from the Goodness which thou discoverest in the Streams, thou mayest be directed to admire that which is in the Fountain.

T H E
Fifth Step.

From the Consideration of the Air.

C H A P. I.

THE Aery Element may prove an excellent Teacher of Morality to Mankind, if its Nature and Properties be duly observ'd. Nor is it only adapted to teach Moral Philosophy, but also to discover the Mysteries of Sacred Theology, and to raise up our Minds to God, if we attend to those several Benefits, which, by divine Appointment, it incessantly affords Mankind.

Air, in the first place, as it administers to Respiration, preserves the Life of Man, and all earthly Creatures. In the next place it is so absolutely necessary in order to our seeing, hearing, and speaking, that if it should happen to be wanting, tho' we have all other Requisites, Blindness, Deafness, and Dumbness would presently seize on us all. And finally, such is the necessity of Air, that Men and other Creatures may be able to move, that take it away, and there's an end of all Motion; all Arts and Sciences are useless, and all the Bu-
siness

Air 1

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Steps of Ascension to God.

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sinners of Mankind is at a stand. To begin with the first.

Did Men understand that there is a Respiration as proper, and necessary to the Soul, as to the Body, many would be saved who now perish. The Body needs continual Respiration, because the natural Heat, by which the Heart is inflamed, by the help of the Lungs, attracting the cool Air, and ejecting the hot, is so temper'd, that it preserves Life, without which Respiration, it could not be continued. From which Consideration it is, that we usually take living and breathing for the same thing; for every one that breatheth, liveth, and he that ceaseth to breath, ceaseth also to live. And thou, my Soul, that thou mayest live a Spiritual Life, which is the Grace of God, hast need of continual Respiration, which is made by sending up ardent Sighs in Prayer unto God, and by fetching from him fresh Supplies of his holy Spirit. For what else is the meaning of those Words of thy Lord, *We ought always to pray, and not to faint*, but this, thou oughtest always to sigh, and receive new Spirit, that the Spiritual Life may not be extinguished in thee? Which he repeats again, when he says, *Watch therefore, and pray continually*. And the Apostle confirms the same in his former Epistle to the *Thessalonians*, saying, *Pray without ceasing*. With whom accords St. Peter in his former Epistle, *Be therefore prudent, and watch unto Prayer*. For this is true Wisdom, that we, who stand in continual need of Divine Assistance, should continually petition for it. Our Father, indeed, knows what things we have need

Luke 18.

Luke 21.

1 Thes. 5.

1 Pet. 4.

Gal. 3.
need of, and he is ready to furnish us with a plentiful Supply, especially of such things as promote our Eternal Salvation, but he will have Prayer the Instrument of bringing them to us : for hereby more Honour accrues to him, and Benefit to us, than if all things should drop into our Mouths, whilst we are stretch'd out upon our Beds of Ease, and our Hands folded to invite Sleep. Therefore our most bountiful Lord exhorts, and earnestly

Luke 11.

importunes us to ask, when he saith, *I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you ; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

And what that is which we should especially make Request for, and which will certainly be granted us, he declares a little after, saying,

If ye being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Ghost to them that ask him ?

For this Holy Spirit we should constantly and earnestly petition, and we need not doubt, but Prayer rightly qualified, will procure it, whereby we shall have Respiration in God, and so preserve Spiritual Life, as holy David

Psal. 120.

did, who said, *I opened my Mouth, and drew in my Breath : that is, I open'd my Mouth in desiring, sighing, and requesting, with groans that cannot be uttered ; and I drew in the most delicious Air of the Spirit of God, which allay'd the heat of Concupiscence, and established me in every good Work.* Now the Case being thus, who will say, that those Persons live in a Spiritual Sense, who spend whole Days, nay, Months, and Years, and never

sigh

fight after God, nor send up Petitions to him ? For it is a certain Sign of Death not to breath, and if to breath is to pray, it will be a Sign of Death not to pray. Spiritual Life, by which we are the Sons of God, consists in Love : Ye see, saith St. John in his Epistle, ¹ John 3. *what Love the Father hath given us, that we should be called, and be, the Sons of God.* But who is in love, and desireth not to see the Person whom he loveth ? Who desires, and asks not for what he desires, from him, who he knows will give if asked ? He then that prays not daily to see the Face of his God, desires not to see him ; he that desires not, loves not ; he that loves not, doth not live. What follows then, but that we conclude those to be dead to God, though the World account them the only living, who converse not with him daily in holy Prayer, nor lift up their Heart towards him ? Neither is he to be reckon'd in the number of such as pray, and breath, and live, that only draws nigh to God with his Lips ; for wise Men define Prayer to be, not a beating the Air with the Voice, but the lifting up the Soul unto God. *not merely words passing thro' the lips*

Therefore, my Soul, don't deceive thy self, in fancying thou livest to God, if thou dost not earnestly seek him with thy whole Heart, and fight after him Day and Night. Pretend not that Multiplicity of Business allows thee not leisure for divine Conferences, and Prayer. The holy Apostles had a great deal of Business upon their Hands, and that too the Work of God, and the Salvation of Souls, insomuch that one of them could say, *Besides* ² Cor. 11. *those*

Prayer

- those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the Care of all the Churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not? And yet this same Apostle, besides his very frequent mentioning of his Prayers,*
- Phil. 3. *writes thus to the Philippians, Our Conversation is in Heaven. This he could say, because in the greatest hurry of Business, he convers'd with Heaven in desire, and did not at any time forget his beloved, otherwise he*
- Gal. 2. *could not say, I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.*

CHAP. II.

Air

ANother Property of the Air is, that it is the *Medium* by which the several kinds of Colours, and Sounds, come to our Eyes and Ears, without which we could neither see nor hear, no, nor speak. On which Account, in the first Place we should give most hearty thanks to God, for vouchsafing our Nature so great a Benefit. And next, we should admire the Wisdom of our Creator, in a Work of such subtlety and fineness: that whereas the Air is a real Body, and so great, that it is almost immensely spacious, yet it can neither be felt nor seen for its inexpressible fineness. Antiquity admired the fineness of one Line, which *Apelles* drew with a Pencil, but that was both seen and felt, and therefore no ways comparable to the fineness of this most subtle Veil, which surrounds, and touch-

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eth all Men, yet is seen of none by reason of its wonderful fineness. But what adds to our wonder is, that though the Air is so very fine, and thin a Body, yet when it is cut in two and parted, with the greatest ease imaginable, it is so clos'd and united again, as if it had never been separated. Certainly, the greatest Artist cannot so repair a broken Spider's Web, or a fine piece of Lawn when rent, but that the former Breach will appear. To this we may add, what calls for our utmost Admiration, and is proper to Divine Wisdom alone, that innumerable Species of Colours, pass at the same time, and without mixing, thro' the very same part of Air. He that in a Moon-shine Night, plac'd in an high and open Place, beholds the Stars above, and sees beneath, the Fields all over bedeckt with Flowers, and beholds also Houses, Trees, living Creatures, and many other such things, cannot but own, that the Species of all these things are contain'd in that part of Air which is near him, and so contain'd, as not to intermix one with another. But who can understand or comprehend this? For how can it be, that a thing so very thin and fine as the Air, should contain at one and the same time, so great variety of Forms? And what, if at the same time, and place, there be the singing of the winged Quiristers on one side, and the warblings of several Musical Instruments on another side, and the murmurs of falling Waters in another, must not all these Sounds, or all their Species, of necessity, be received at one and the same time in that very Air, which receives so many Forms of Colours?

Who,

Who, my Soul, could so order Matters, but thy Creator, who only doth wonderful things? And if his Works are so wonderful, how far more wonderful must He himself be? But there is another conveniency of this admirable Subtlety in the Air, *viz.* that it hinders not, but helps the Motion of all things which pass from Place to Place. We are very sensible with what difficulty Ships are haled along the Water, tho' liquid and easy to be parted. For sometimes both Winds and Oars are insufficient, and we are fain to joyn the Forces of Horses and other Creatures. And if it happen that a way must be open'd thro' Mountains or Hills, at what Expence of Sweat, and Toil, and Time, are we forc'd to be, in making but a short Cut? But without any Pains, with very great ease and dispatch, Horses run, Birds fly, Darts and Arrows are thrown through the Air, and Men, for the Execution of their several Offices, go up and down, walk about, run to and fro, move their Feet, Arms, and Hands, upwards and downwards, to the right and left, nor doth the Air, which is spread all about, give any more hindrance to them, than if it were not a bodily, but spiritual Nature, or than if it were nothing at all.

C H A P. III.

IN the last place we may add, that the nature of the Air is so pliant and yielding, so susceptible of any Form, so apt to be divided, and cut asunder for Man's conveniency,

that

Steps of Ascension to God.

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that it seems to be given Mankind to instruct them in the great Duties of Humility, Patience, and Charity. But, my Soul, that which should especially excite in thee the love of God, and enflame thy heart therewith, is this consideration, that this very same Air doth represent the incredible sweetness and exceeding great bounty of its Creator to Mankind. Consider, I beseech thee, my Soul, and attentively observe, that thy Lord is ever present with all his Creatures, that he works together with all, and, which is infinitely endearing, that he accommodates, and suits his co-operation to the nature of all, and as it were says with the Apostle, *I am become all things to all men*, that I may help and perfect all: with necessary Agents he co-operates that they may act necessarily; with voluntary Agents, that they may act voluntarily; with free Agents, that they may act with freedom. Fire He so moves and helps, that it may mount upwards: Earth, that it may tend downwards: Water, that it may slide along descending places: Air, that it may pass whithersoever it is driven: the Starrs, that they may run as it were in a Ring: Herbs, Shoots, and Plants, that they may bring forth Fruits according to their nature: Creatures of the Earth, Air, and Water, that they may act as their nature dictates to them. And if the kindness of God so appear in co-operating with his Creatures in works of Nature, what may we suppose he doth in works of Grace? God indeed hath given Man Free-will, but so, that he can govern him by his Command, terrify him with Destruction, and allure him by Benefactions.

Grace 83
Free Will

- 1 Tim. 2. factions. God wills that all Men should be saved, but he so wills, that he will have them also to will and desire the same thing, and therefore he so graciously prevents, excites, directs, and carries as through the several Stages of Duty, that we cannot but admire, and stand amazed at his wise dispensations towards us. These are the Contrivances of the Wisdom of God, concerning which *Esaiah* saith, *Declare his doings among the people.* And indeed one while he severely terrifieth the Wicked, another while he lovingly encourages them; now he gently admonishes, and by and by in mercy correcteth, as in his wisdom he sees most likely to work upon their Tempers and Dispositions. Do but mind how gently the Lord dealt with the first Sinner;
- Gen. 3. *Adam*, saith he, *where art thou?* and when *Adam* made this reply, *I heard thy voice in Paradise, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid my self;* the Lord went on with the like Gentleness, and said, *Who told thee that thou wast naked, hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?* And no doubt but *Adam*, after he was thus kindly rebuk'd, repented, according to that in the Book of Wisdom, *This (wisdom) preserv'd him who was made by God the Father of the world, and brought him out of his transgression.* Observe further how gently and lovingly he rebuk'd and invited to repentance all the Children of Israel by his Angel. *The Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your Fathers, and said, I will never break my Covenant with you. And ye shall*
- 1 Judg 2.
Bochim 21

Steps of Ascension to God.

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shall make no League with the Inhabitants of this Land, you shall throw down their Altars, but ye have not obeyed my voice, why have ye done this? And it came to pass when the Angel of the Lord spake these words unto the Children of Israel, that the People lift up their voices and wept, and they called the name of the place Bochim, and they sacrificed there unto the Lord. Now that here was a very great and general Lamentation, and a Sign of true Repentance, the new Name given to that Place doth evince, for the perpetual Memory of Posterity, that the same Place should be called the Place of them that weep, or the Place of Tears. What now shall I say of the Prophets? They surely in all their Sermons do teach and proclaim this, That God desires not the Death of Sinners, but rather that they should turn and live. They say, saith the Lord by Jeremy, if a Man put away his Wife, and she go from him, and become another Man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that Land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many Lovers, yet return again unto me, saith the Lord. And by Ezek. Thus ye speak, saying, If our Transgressions and our Sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, as I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O House of Israel? But omitting the wicked; the Greatness of Divine Mercy and Benignity far surpassing that of a Father or Mother, towards them that fear him, and hope in him, cannot be expressed. Thus saith David, As the Heaven is high above the Earth, so great is his

Ezek. 18.
Jer. 3.
Ezek. 33.
Psal. 103.

G Mercy

Mercy towards them that fear him. Like as a Father pitieth his Children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Again, The Mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, upon them that fear him : And in the 34th Psalm, O taste and see how gracious the Lord is, blessed is the Man that hopeth in him. And in the 71st Psalm, God is good unto Israel even to such as are of an upright Heart ! that is, the Goodness, Condescension, and Sweetness of the Lord, are inexpressibly great towards pious and righteous Souls.

49.

Lam. 3.

Thus also saith the Lord by Esaias, Can a Woman forget her sucking Child, that she should not have pity on the Son of her Womb? yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee? And Jeremy in his Lamentations, The Lord is my Portion, saith my Soul, therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good to them that wait for him, to the Soul that seeketh him. It is good that a Man should quietly wait for the Salvation of God.

But if I had a mind to add what the Apostles have to say of the Fatherly Bowels of our Lord God, towards them that love and obey him, I should be tedious. That one Passage may serve for all, which we find in the first Chapter of St. Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians ; Blessed be the Lord God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Mercies, and the God of all Consolation, who comforteth us in all our Tribulation, that we also might comfort them who are in any Affliction. The Apostle doth not say that God is a Comforter, but that he is full of all Consolation. Nor doth he say Who comforteth us in some Tribulation, but in every Tribulation ; nor that we may comfort them who are in some, but those who

labour

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labour under all kinds of Tribulation. He could not therefore more fully express how gracious and benevolent the Lord is towards those whom he loves, and of whom he is beloved.

But in the last Place it seems not amiss to subjoyn the Words of *St. Prosper*, in which he declares the Goodness of God, not only towards the Good and Virtuous, but to the Vicious also, in order to their Conversion; *Grace*, saith he, is the principal and most eminent of all the Means that contribute to Justification, and influences all the rest, in persuading by Exhortations, admonishing by Examples, deterring by Dangers, inciting by wonderful Providences, by giving Understanding, inspiring Counsel, and illuminating the Heart it self, and seasoning it with the Affections of Faith. But the Will of Man acts in Subordination to, and in Conjunction with this Grace, being stirr'd up by the Aids now mentioned to co-operate with the Work of God in it self, and begin to employ this Talent of Grace to produce Faith and Obedience; for all Deficiency it is to thank its own Inconstancy, and to ascribe its Proficiency to the Assistance of Grace. This Assistance is vouchsafed to all in manifold and various ways, some dark and concealed, others plain and manifest: That by many it is rejected, is owing to their Wickedness; and that by many it is embrac'd, is to be attributed partly to Divine Grace, and partly to the Will of Man.

St Prosper

79 Grace

Well then, my Soul, if thy Creator is so kind and gracious towards his Servants; if he exercises such wonderful kindness and forbearance towards Sinners, in expectation of their Conversion, and so comforts and supports the

G 2

Righte-

Righteous, in order to their making farther Advances in Righteousness and Holiness; oughtest thou also to bear gently with thy Neighbours, and to become all things to all Men, that thou mayest win them all to thy God and Lord? Consider with thy self to what a degree of Excellency the Apostle exhorts thee, when he saith, *Be ye followers of God as dear Children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and gave himself for us, an Oblation and Sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling Savour.*

Ephe. 5.

Matth. 5.

Imitate God the Father, Who causeth his Sun to rise upon the good and evil, and giveth Rain both to the just and unjust. Imitate God the Son, who having assum'd Humane Nature for our sakes, spared not his own Life to deliver us from the Powers of Darkness, and from everlasting Perdition. Imitate God the Holy Ghost, who plentifully sheds abroad his most precious Gifts, that he may purify our Souls, and of earthly and carnal, make us become Heavenly and Spiritual.

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THE Sixth Step.

From the Consideration of Fire.

C H A P. I.

FIRE is an Element so very pure, and noble, that God himself was pleased to be call'd by that Name, according to what both *Moses* and *Paul* affirm, *Our God is a* Deut. 4. *consuming Fire.* And when God first appeared Heb. 12. to *Moses*, it was his pleasure to be seen in Fire, which seized on a Bush, and did not consume it. God, saith *Moses*, appear'd in a Exod. 3. *Flame of Fire out of the midst of the Bush, and he saw that the Bush burned, and was not consumed.* And when God likewise came to give his Law to his People, he appear'd in the likeness of Fire; for thus saith the same *Moses*, *Mount Sinai was all on smoke, because the* Exod. 19. *Lord descended upon it in Fire.* Agreeably to which Mystery, when the new Law was to be published, the Holy Ghost appear'd to the Acts 2. *Apostles in Tongues of Fire.* And finally, they who in Heaven make the nearest Approach to God, are called *Seraphim*, that is fiery, because they conceive a greater degree

Steps of Ascension to God.

of Fervour and Heat, from that Divine and most ardent Fire, than the other Orders of Angels do. It will therefore be no difficult Matter to make us a Step, from the Nature and Properties of this Element, which by the Assistance of Prayer and Meditation, will advance us nearer to God. It will certainly be less difficult to mount upwards with *Elias* in a fiery Chariot, than to make Steps of Ascension from either Earth, Water, or Air.

25. 26

Come we then to consider the Properties of Fire. "Fire is of such a Nature, that in different things, it works after a different, and many times a contrary manner." Such things as ^{*}Wood, Hay, and Stubble, it forthwith consumes : but Gold, Silver, and precious Stones it purifies, and renders more beautiful. Iron, which is naturally black, cold, hard, and heavy, Fire so transmutes into contrary Qualities, that it presently becomes bright and hot, soft and light ; nay, that it shines like a Star, burns like Fire, dissolves like Water, lays aside its ponderousness, and becomes so light, that the Smith can manage it at Pleasure.

All these things manifestly agree to God. And in the first place, ^{*}Wood, Hay, Stubble, according to the Apostle, in his former Epistle to the *Corinthians*, signify evil Works, which cannot bear the Fire of Divine Judgment. And, indeed, it is not to be imagin'd how sorely all Sins displease God, who is most pure Fire ; and with how great Zeal he consumes and destroys them, if they may be destroyed by Repentance, that is, if the Sinner is in a State that is capable of Repentance ; for

for by Repentance all Sins are done away : but if the Sinner is incapable of Repentance, as evil Spirits are, and all Men after this Life, then the Wrath of God lights upon the wicked themselves, for as the Wise Man saith, *The wicked and his wickedness are abomination to* Wisd. 14. *the Lord.* Now how great and severe this hatred is, which God executes upon the finally impenitent, the Devil can attest, who sinned once, and tho' he was a most glorious Angel, and (as some conceive) the Prince of the first Order of Angels, and the most excellent of the Creatures of God; yet was presently thrown down from Heaven, stripp'd of all his Supernatural Grace and Glory; transformed into a most ugly Monster, and enslav'd to everlasting destruction. Of this Christ is witness, who came down from Heaven to destroy the Works of the Devil, that is, Sin : and is therefore called "the Lamb of God which taketh away the Sins of the World."

Now that Christ might destroy the Works of the Devil, and make compleat Satisfaction to Divine Justice, who can declare, or so much as conceive, what Hardships he endur'd?

Who being in the Form of God, made himself of no Philip. 2. *reputation, and took upon him the Form of a Ser-*

vant; who when he was rich became poor for our 2 Cor. 8.

sakes; who had not a Place where to lay his Luke 9.

Head, tho' he was the Creator of both Hea- John 1. *ven and Earth: He came to his own, and his*

own received him not; when he was reviled, he 1 Pet. 2.

reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatned

not, but committed himself to him that judgeth

righteously; who his own self did bear our Sins in Philip. 2.

his own Body on the Tree: He humbled himself, 1 Pet. 2.

and became obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Cross : by whose Stripes we are healed : And lastly, being mocked, spit upon, scourged, crown'd with Thorns, crucified with the greatest Reproach, and most grievous Pain, shed his Blood, and expir'd. All this he underwent to destroy the Works of the Devil, and to atone for our Sins. To this the Law of God attests, which forbids, and punisheth, Sin in general, and leaves not so much as an idle Word unaccounted for. And how must he abominate all great and heinous Crimes, who cannot endure so much as an idle Word ? *The Law of the Lord is undefiled, and the Precepts of the Lord give light ;* they utterly dislike Impurity and Darkness ; neither can there be any Communion betwixt Light and Darkness, nor betwixt Righteousness and Iniquity. To conclude, Hell it self is witness hereto, which God hath prepar'd for the Wicked, and Sinners, who, when they might have been cleansed with the Blood of the immaculate Lamb, either refused or neglected : For it is equitable that there should be no end of Punishment to those, whose Sins shall everlastingly remain. But what the Nature of infernal Punishment is, and how great, I dare not so much as consider in my Thoughts. But of this we will say something more in the last Step.

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Therefore, my Soul, since Iniquity is so detestable in the sight of God, if thou lovest God above all things, thou oughtest also to hate Sin above all things. Have a care of being impos'd upon by those who go about to extenuate and excuse Sin : See that thou
cheat

cheat not thy self by false reasoning. If Sin is not displeasing to thee, both in thy self and others, pretend what thou wilt, thou lovest not God, and if thou lovest him not, thou art lost and undone. But further, if thou art not ungrateful to Christ, how much thinkest thou, art thou indebted to his Love and Labour? For his shedding his Blood, and dying for thee? To Christ, I say, who wash'd thee from thy Sins, and reconciled thee to his Father? Canst thou think much after this to suffer something for Christ, or for his Sake, and with his Assistance, to make a stand against Sin, even unto Blood? But to conclude, if thou canst not patiently dwell with everlasting Burnings, sure I am, thou oughtest as impatiently to continue in Sin; nay, thou oughtest to shun it, and all occasions of being betray'd to it, as thou wouldest shun the Face of a Serpent. Make then a firm and stedfast Resolution, always to joyn the greatest Hatred of Sin, with the greatest Love to God.

C H A P. II.

NOW there are some things, such as Gold, Silver, and precious Stones, which Fire doth not destroy, but perfect, and renders more bright and radiant, because (as the same Apostle there explains them) those Metals denote good and perfect Works, which are approved of in the Fire of Divine Judgment, and shall receive a great Reward. Those Works God approves of, because they are

- are his own Gifts, and when he crowns our Merits (saith St. *Augustin*) he crowns his own Gifts. For they are done at his Command, by his Assistance, by his conferring upon us the Power of acting, and by his directing us by the Laws which he hath enacted, and the Rules which he hath prescrib'd. Gold, indeed, denotes Works of Charity : but how can it be, that such Works should not be highly pleasing to God, who is Love it self?
- John 4. Silver denotes Works of Wisdom, of those Persons, I mean, who instruct many unto
- Dan. 12. Righteousness : and such Works are very grateful and acceptable to God ; for thus saith
- Matth. 5. the Wisdom of God, *He that doth, and teacheth, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of God.* Precious Stones are the Works of a chaste and continent Soul, which Works *Ecclesiasticus* 26. affirms to be invaluable. And from hence it is, that in the Ecclesiastical Office, in Praise of holy Virgins, the Gospel is read concerning the precious Pearl that was found. How grateful Virginal Purity is to God, we may learn from the Prophet *Esaias*, who in the Name of God, foretells to the Eunuchs, that
- Matth. 19. is to those who have made themselves so, for
- Esa. 56. the Kingdom of Heaven ; *Unto them will I give in mine House, and within my Walls, a Place and a Name better than of Sons, and of Daughters, and I will give them an ever-lasting Name, which shall not be cut off.* Which Place St. *Augustine* in his Treatise of holy Virginity, demonstrates in a lofty Harangue, that it should be understood of holy Virgins both Male and Female.

Steps of Ascension to God.

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Neither yet shall only the Charity of Martyrs, the Wisdom of Doctors, or Purity of Virgins, be approv'd of in the Fire of Divine Judgment, and receive a full Reward, but all other good Works, provided they be done in Charity, shall be reckoned amongst the Golden Vessels; shall be able to endure the Divine Fire, and shall not fail of a Reward. For to such will the Lord say at the last Judgment.

Come ye blessed of my Father, receive the Mat. 25.

Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the World, who have given Bread to the Hungry, Drink to the Thirsty, Lodging to the Stranger, Clothing to the Naked, Consolation to the Sick, and to the Imprisoned. And the same Lord hath graciously promised, that those shall not fall short of their Reward, who out of Charity shall give only a Cup of cold Water in the Name of a Disciple.

Mat. 10.

Art thou sensible, O my Soul, of the great difference betwixt some Works, and others? And wherein canst thou discover more wretched Folly, than by rising early, and sitting up late, by incessant Toil and Drudgery, to pick up dry Wood, Hay, and Stubble in that very Place, and at the self same time, wherein, hadst thou any Wisdom, thou mayest furnish thy self with Gold, and Silver, and precious Stones, and that with the greatest Ease and Pleasure? O that thou wert wise, that thou

Deut. 32.

wouldst understand this, and consider thy latter end? Consider, I say, that at the last Day when all these things will be examined, and try'd in the Fire of Divine Judgment; the first shall have the Honour of Divine Applause, and be crown'd with Eternal Life; and that the

the

the last will perish in the Tryal, and be reduc'd to Smoak and Ashes! Why dost thou now make choice of what thou wilt most certainly repent to have chosen? And why dost thou not now condemn, when thou mayest to good purpose, what thou wilt afterwards do to no purpose at all? And if it so happens that thou canst not now see into these things, and the interposition of worldly Concerns permits thee not to discern pure and plain Truth; pray with the greatest earnestness and affection, with that blind

Luke 18. Man in the Gospel, *Lord grant that mine Eyes*
 Psal. 118. *may be opened*: or with the Prophet, *Open mine*
Eyes, that I may see the wonderful things of thy
Law. For sure it is no less than a Wonder, that the Works which are done in Charity, should become Gold, Silver, and precious Stones; that those which are not done in Charity, should be converted into dry Wood, Hay, and Stubble.

CHAP. III.

PROCEED we now to consider another Property of Fire. For we have yet only learn'd from it the manner of Divine Operations in those who carry their Sins to the Grave, or persevere in good Works to the end of their Life. Now by another Similitude drawn from the same Fire, we may understand how God operates with those whom he calls from Sin to Repentance.

A sinful Man is like to Iron, the which whilst it is at a distance from the Fire, is black, cold, hard, and heavy; but if it be put into the Fire, it is made bright, warm, soft, and light. Every Sinner wanteth interiour Light, and walketh in Darkness, and in this Respect resembles the blackness of Iron. For notwithstanding that in the Sciences, and in his Transactions with Men, he seems to be not only very witty, but very judicious too; yet in passing Judgment about what is really good and evil, he is blind, and in a more wretched Condition, than a Man that is blind indeed. For such a one discerns nothing, and therefore stirs not without a Guide; but a Sinner fancies he sees, what he sees not, or sees one thing for another, and takes good for evil, and evil for good; great for little, and little for great; long for short, and short for long; and therefore is always mistaken in his Choice. This is what the Apostle saith concerning the Heathen Idolaters, *Having the Eph. 4. Understanding darkened through the Ignorance which is in them, because of the blindness of their Heart.* This is what our Lord himself so often upbraids the Scribes and Pharisees with in the Gospel, that *they were blind, and leaders of the blind.* Matth. 15. This is what the Prophet Esaias saith to the Jews of his time, *Hear ye deaf, and look ye blind that ye may see.* Esaias 42. And to these he foretells the coming of Christ, who should open the Eyes of the blind; and speaking of the New Testament in the Person of God, he adds, *And I will bring the blind by a way which they know not, and will lead them in Paths which they have not known; I will make darkness light before*

before them, and crooked things straight. Lastly, shall not the wicked themselves acknowledge so much after this Life, when Pain shall begin to open the Eyes of their Mind, which had been closed by Guilt and Wickedness? We have erred, will they say, from the way of Truth, and the Light of Righteousness hath not shined upon us, and the Sun of Righteousness rose not upon us. Nor is it any wonder that they are thus blind, who are alienated from God both in Will and Mind. For God is Light, and in him is no Darknes at all. Whereupon the same Apostle concludes, He that saith he is in the Light, and hateth his Brother, is in Darknes until now. And a little after, He that hateth his Brother is in Darknes, and walketh in Darknes, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because Darknes hath blinded his Eyes.

Not is the only Cause of Sinners Blindness, that they turn away from God who is Light, but Malice is another, which, as the Wise Man saith, hath blinded them. For the Passions of the Mind, such as Love, and Hatred, Anger, Envy, and other things which are comprehended under the Name of Malice, do so blind the Mind, that they suffer not the Truth to be discerned; but are like discolour'd Prospective Glasses, which represent white things as red: or Glasses so contriv'd, as to make great things of small, or small of great; or near of very remote, or very remote of near. He that is far engag'd in Love, judgeth the thing he is in love with, to be very amiable, useful and excellent, nay, indeed, necessary, and such as he cannot be without, and therefore to be purchased, tho' with the

the neglect and ruine of all his other Concerns. On the contrary, he that hates the very same thing to a great degree, looks upon the same as devoid of Loveliness and Beauty, accounts it useles, incommodious, nay, destructive to him, and therefore will spare no Cost to keep it at a distance. But if that black and rusty Iron be applied to the Fire, that is, if the Sinner begin to turn from Sin, and convert to God, according to that of the Psalmist, *Come unto him, and be ye enlightned*; Psal. 33. he begins by little and little to clear up, and by that Light to discern the plain Truth of the Matter, according to what the same Prophet affirmeth, *In thy Light we shall see Light*. And Psal. 34. having at last broken the discolour'd Perspectives of Passions, and taken up instead thereof, the ChrySTALLINE ones of Charity unfeigned, he judgeth eternal things to be great; and temporal things to be small, and inconsiderable, as they really are: and very evidently perceives; that all the Glory, and Beauty of the Creatures, is no ways comparable to the Light of Wisdom, and Truth, which is in God, and is God. Such an one is ready to cry out with St. Augustin. "I began to love Thee too late, O ancient and new Beauty, I loved Thee too late! And because Christ saith, *Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free*"; he that is illuminated, and, by the light of Truth, delivered from the Fetters of Concupiscence, Avarice, Ambition, and the rest of the Passions, is with the Prophet transported with Joy, and saith, *Lord thou hast broken my Bonds asunder, I will offer to thee a Sacrifice of Praise, and will call on the Name of the Lord*. Psal. 116.

C H A P. IV.

BUT Fire doth not only render Iron bright and shining, that at first was obscure, and dark, but of cold makes it warm; and not only warm, but so vehemently hot, that it seems to be true, and living Fire. Great is the Lord, and great is his Power, who makes a Man that is cold by Nature, and ready to tremble at the shaking of a Leaf; one that has neither Courage to speak, nor shew his Face, nor to attempt any thing of difficulty; who makes such an one, by heating him at the Fire of Charity, more daring than a Lion, to roar as frightfully, to overcome all Opposition, readily to engage with Difficulties, and to cry out with the Apostle Paul, who was enflamed by this Fire, *I can do all things through him that strengthens me.*

Phil. 4

But let us speak particularly of the Efficacy of this Fire; and first let us briefly discourse of the Efficacy of Words, and then of the Efficacy of Deeds. There are now, and ever have been, in the Church, many Preachers of God's Word. What is the Reason that so few are converted at the Calls and Exhortations of so many Men? In some great Cities, during the time of Lent, there is opportunity of hearing Sermons every Day, and yet when that time is over, there appears little or no Reformation in the Life, and Conversation of the Citizens. The same vicious Inclinations, the same Injustice and Pride, the same Coldness and

and Indifferency, the same Dissoluteness is to be seen. I cannot assign a more probable Reason for the Unsuccessfulness of their Labours, than making it their primary care to deliver learned, elegant, and florid Harangues, after a cold, unaffectionate and unmoving manner. In a word, there is a want of that great Charity, which only can animate the Hearts of Speakers, and inflame and change the Hearts of them that hear. I speak not this as if Preachers were afraid of their Lungs, or did not use Action enough in their Pulpits; for we know very well that Guns, without a Charge of Bullets make a thundering Report, but execute nothing. What I complain of, is, their not expressing a zealous Affection for God, and the Salvation of Souls, and that not dissembled, but real; not extorted, but flowing as it were naturally from the fountain of the Heart. St. Peter was unacquainted with Rhetorick, or the Art of Speaking, his Skill did chiefly consist in managing a Boat, in mending his Nets, and in a dexterity of casting them. But when the Holy Ghost came upon him in tongues of Fire, and fill'd him with flaming Charity, he presently began to speak in the midst of the City *Jerusalem*, with so great Power, Zeal and Efficacy, that by one Sermon he converted thousands to Faith and Repentance. Acts 2. Nor do we find that in his preaching, he rais'd his Voice to any extraordinary height, or figur'd himself with theatrical Gestures. We find related in the life of an holy Preacher, who was inconsiderable for Learning, and unvers'd in rhetorical Arts, that the People heard

his Sermons with such Attention, as if he had been an Angel from Heaven. The reason given for their Attention is, because his Words were as burning Fire, and piercing into the inner parts of the Heart. And that the People were greatly edified, and excited to Repentance, in hearing him, is attributed to this, that the Preacher was a Coal of Fire, and his Word a Burning Torch.

- But this divine Fire discovers its Efficacy no less in Acts than in Words. God decreed by his Apostles to bring the World in subjection to Himself. Some he sent to the *Ethiopians*, some to the *Indians*, some to the *Scythians*, some to the *Britains*, and others to other places. By these Instruments he decreed to destroy the Idols of the World, to erect the Trophy of the Cross, to change Laws and Customs, and to overthrow the Tyranny of the Devil. Should any have foretold this to the Apostles when they were fishing in the Lake *Gennesareth*; or when, at the Passion of our Lord, they sought for places to hide themselves; they wou'd have look'd on such a Prediction no better than a Dream, or an old Woman's Fable; and yet, not long after, all this was effected, and by no other Force than
- 1 John 4. than that of most ardent Charity, which the Holy Ghost had enkindled in their Hearts:
- 2 Cor. 13. *For love, as the Apostle saith, casts out fear, endureth all things, hopeth all things; accounteth all things possible, and with the Apostle cryeth out, I can do all things through him who strengtheneth me.* Thus we see Idolatry universally overthrown; Christian Churches every where founded; and the Trophy of the Cross

Cross erected in all Kingdoms; and all this without an Army of Soldiers, or any warlike provision, by the means and endeavour of those Men, that were furnish'd with no other Armour but that of Charity.

C H A P. V.

Fire hath this further Property, that of hard
it makes Iron soft, so that it may with
ease be made thin, and beaten into Plates,
and receive any Figure which the Artift hath
a mind to impress upon it. Great is the
force of Fire upon Iron; but far greater is
the Power of God upon the obstinate and
obdurate Hearts of Men. Hear what *St. Ber-*
nard saith in his Book of Consideration. “ It
“ is only, saith he, an hard heart which is
“ not horribly afraid of it self, by reason of
“ its Insensibility. What is then an hard
“ heart? It is that which is not wounded
“ with Compunction, nor mollified with Pie-
“ ty, nor moved with Prayers; that relents
“ not at Menaces, that is harden'd by Stripes,
“ is ungrateful for Benefits, and regardless
“ to counsel and advice. He adds a little
after: “ It is that which neither fears God,
“ nor reverenceth Men. For the truth of all
which we need only appeal unto *Pharaoh*,
who, the more God inflicted his Scourges up-
on him, was so much the more hardened;
and the more the Mercy of God signaliz'd
it self, in removing the Scourge, the more
was he encouraged to despise and contemn

Luke 7.

God. But if at any time, God is pleased to enkindle one Spark of Fire, of true and sincere Love to himself, in a Heart that is never so hard, it will presently grow soft, and melt like Wax; nor can Obstipacy, though never so stiff, and of long standing, hold out against the Power thereof; but that will presently become an Heart of Flesh, which was an Heart of Stone; and Waters shall flow from congealed Snow as soon as the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it. This is exemplify'd to us in that Woman in St. Luke, who took such delight in sinning, that neither the Admonitions of a Brother, nor the Rebukes of a Sister, nor the Reputation of her Family, nor her own Disgrace, could move to betake herself to a virtuous course; and yet one ray of Christ descending into her Heart, and there enkindling a spark of divine Love, on a sudden made so through a change in her, that she was not ashamed (tho' a person of quality) to prostrate herself at Christ's Feet at a publick Entertainment; and dissolving into Tears, to bath his Feet therewith, and to make a Towel of her Hair to wipe them, and out of an excess of love, to kiss the same Feet, and to anoint them with very costly and sweet Ointment, to intimate, that for the future she would dedicate herself, and all she had, to the Service of Christ. For this was she vouchsafed this gracious Answer from our Lord, *Her Sins, tho' many, are forgiven her, because she loved much.*

C H A P. VI.

THere remains the last Property of Fire, that it rarifies things gross, and enables them with ease to mount upwards. What is the reason that Men not heated with Divine Fire, are so heavy hearted, and that the Prophet saith to them, *How long will ye love vanity, and seek after lies?* The reason is given by the Wiseman, viz. *Because the corruptible beweecheth down the soul.* And an heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mothers womb, till the day that they return to the mother of all things. Now what this heavy yoke is, which in the body of Man thus encumbers the Soul, the same Author acquaints us a little after, when he adds, *Wrath and envy, trouble and disquietude, fear of death, and anger, and strife, and other things which are called the passions of the Soul.* These things sit so heavy upon Man, that he can fix his Eyes on nothing but Earth, on which he lies groveling, to which he is nail'd and glw'd, so that he cannot raise himself from thence to seek after God, nor to run the ways of his Commandments. But when the Divine Fire descends from on high, and begins to kindle in the heart of Man, those Passions do sensibly dwindle and mortifie, and the heavy burden grows light; and if this heat gathers strength, the Heart of Man easily throws off its burden, and instead thereof, takes the Wings of a Dove, and is able to say with the Apostle, *Our conversation is in heaven;* and his Heart being as it were enlarged by Fire,

Luke 12, professes with David, *I have run the ways of thy commandments, since thou hast enlarged mine heart.* Doubtless since our Saviour said, *I am come to send fire upon earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?* We have seen great numbers of Men so to unburden themselves, as to quit all affection to Honours and Riches, and carnal delights, and have said to Christ departing hence to Heaven, *Draw us after thee.* From hence so many Churches and Religious Houses have been erected; so many Persons have retir'd to Desarts, that they might more closely converse with God, that even the weaker Sex have been able to run the ways of God's Commandments, and to follow the Lamb whithersoever he went.

O blessed Fire that dost not Consume, but Enlighten; or if thou may'st be said to consume, it is only our noxious Humours, which would otherwise stifle and extinguish Life! O who will help me to a Touch from this Fire? a Fire which by the light of true Wisdom, would perfectly cure me of the Blackness of Ignorance, and the Darkness of an Erroneous Conscience; which would exchange the Cold of Laziness, Indevotion, and Carelessness, for the Ardour of Love; that would never suffer my Heart to be hardened, but ever mollifie it with its Heat, and make it obedient and devout: and lastly, which would take away the heavy Yoke of worldly concerns, and earthly Desires, and with the wings of holy Contemplation, which nourisheth Charity, and makes it thrive, would raise mine Heart on high, so that I might say with the Prophet, *make glad, O Lord, the soul of thy servant, for I have lifted up my soul unto thee.*

Psal. 85.

THE

T H E

Seventh Step.

*From the Consideration of Heaven, Sun,
Moon and Stars.*

C H A P. I.

WE shall not in this place need to be at the expence of any great pains to approach one Step nearer to God, from consideration of Heaven, for the royal Prophet hath shew'd us the way, who in his Psalms thus sings, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his handy-work.* And because there are two Seasons, in which, from considering the Heavens, we ascend to God on the wings of Contemplation, viz. Day and Night; of the former he thus writes in the same Psalm, *He hath plac'd* Psalm 19. *his tabernacle in the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a gyant to run a race. His going forth is from the end of heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat of it.* Of the other season he writes in another Psalm, Psalm 8. *See the heavens, the works of thine hands, the moon*

and stars which thou hast ordained. Begin we with the former Season. The holy Spirit, by the Pen of *David*, records a four-fold commendation of the Sun, which presents it self to our View in the day-time; the first, that it is the Tabernacle of God; the second, that 'tis very beautiful; the third, that 'tis very swift, incessant, and indefatigable in its Motion; the fourth, that it principally displays its Power in administering Light and Heat. All which Considerations made the Wiseman pronounce it, *A marvellous instrument, the work of the most High.*

Ecclus. 4.

In the first place then, God the Universal Creator hath pitch'd his Tabernacle in the Sun, as in a thing of the greatest Note and Eminency; that is, God hath made choice of the Sun, rather than any other corporal thing, to dwell in, as in a Royal Palace, or Divine Sanctuary. God indeed filleth Heaven and Earth, yea, Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain him; yet is he said there more especially to reside, where he discovers greater Evidences of his presence, by his wonderful Operations. But since in the original it is said, *In them* (that is, in the Heavens) *hath he set a tabernacle for the sun*; we infer from this part of the Psalm, another Excellency of the Sun, which is not inconsistent with the former. The Sun is a vastly great thing, for which God hath prepared a most spacious, beautiful, and noble Palace. For God would have Heaven its self to be the Palace of the Sun, where it might have a spacious Orb to move in, and shed its Influences; and that the Sun it self should be the Palace

of

of God, who is King of Kings. As therefore we know the Greatness and Eminency of the Sun, because Heaven is its Tabernacle; so we know, in some measure, the Greatness and Eminency of God, by this, that the Sun is his Tabernacle; the Sun, that admirable Instrument, than which nothing is found more wonderful amongst corporeal things.

In the next place, *David*, that he might discover to us the exquisite Beauty of the Sun, from things that we are acquainted with, he compares it to a Bridegroom going out of his Chamber: For Men are never more curious in adorning themselves, nor more desirous to set themselves off to the best Advantage, than at that time they are Bridegrooms; for then they take especial care to recommend themselves to, and appear amiable in the Eyes of the Bride, with whom they are passionately in love. But if we could steadfastly behold the Sun, and were able to make so near an approach to it, as perfectly to discover his Quantity and Quality, we should not need the similitude of a Bridegroom to comprehend its Incredible Beauty. All the Beauty of Colours doth certainly depend on Light; and in the absence of Light, all the Gracefulness thereof vanishes; therefore nothing is more beautiful than Light, and God himself, who is Beauty it self, was pleas'd to be call'd Light. *God, saith St. John, is light, 1 John 1. and in him is no darkness at all.* Besides, amongst corporeal things, nothing is more lucid and bright than the Sun, and consequently, nothing is more fair and beautiful than the

the Sun. To this we may add, that the Beauty of inferiour things, and especially of Mankind, doth soon decay; but the Beauty of the Sun doth not perish by age, nor suffer the least diminution, but continually cheers all things with equal Splendor. Do we not perceive how all things, seem after a manner, to rejoice at the rising of the Sun? For not only Men are affected therewith, but Winds breathe more sweetly, Flowers display all their Beauties, Herbs raise their drooping heads, and Birds fill the Air with delightful Ditties. Hence old *Tobit* reply'd to the Angel wishing him always Joy, *What joy can befall me, who sit in darkness, and see not the light of the sun.*

5 Chap.

Well then, my Soul, consider with thy self, if the created Sun at its Up-rise thus cheers all things; what will the uncreated Sun do, who is infinitely more bright and glorious, when he shall arise to be seen, and contemplated by pure hearts, not for a little time, and then disappear, but for evermore? And what a dismal and melancholy hour will come upon those poor Wretches, who shall be dismiss'd to take up their final Abode in everlasting darkness, where they will never be visited by the cheerful Influence either of the created or uncreated Sun? And what Joy and Exultation shall come to that Soul, that shall be thus saluted by the Father of

Matth. 25. Lights, Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

C H A P. II.

IN the next place the same Prophet celebrates the most wonderful course of the Sun, *which rejoyceth*, saith he, *as a Gyant to run a Race.* A mighty Gyant, sure, if his Steps bear proportion to the bulk of his Body, and if he's as nimble, as strong, will travel a great way in a little time. As the Prophet before had compar'd the Sun to a Bridegroom, that he might represent to us, as well as he could, the Beauty of the Sun; so afterwards he compar'd him to a Gyant, that by such another Similitude, he might discover to us likewise, the wonderfully swift motion of the same. But if instead of Man, tho' never so great and mighty, he had compar'd him to Birds flying, to the swiftness of Arrows out of a Bow, nay, to Winds, and Lightning, he had fallen very short of the Truth and Reality of the matter. For if there is Truth in what we behold with our Eyes, that in the space of twenty four hours the Sun runs thro' the whole Circuit of his Sphere; and if the Circuit of his Sphere doth very much exceed that of the Earth; and if the Circuit of the Earth contains about twenty thousand Miles, all which are certainly true; it necessarily follows, that the Sun every Hour runs many thousand Miles. Every Hour did I say? yea, every Quarter, and almost every Minute of an Hour. For he that has a mind to observe the Rising or the Setting of the Sun,

Sun, especially in an open Horizon, as at Sea, or in an open Country, will find that the whole Body of the Sun mounts above the Horizon in less space than the eighth part of an Hour; and yet the Diameter of the solar body is much greater than the Diameter of the Earth, tho' this contains seven thousand miles. I my self had once the Curiosity to know exactly how long the whole body of the Sun was a setting. At his touching the Horizon, I began to read the fifty first Psalm, and had scarcely read it twice over, when it was quite out of sight: So that in this little time, in which this Psalm was twice read over, the Sun must have travell'd above seven thousand Miles. Who could give credit to this, were it not demonstrably certain? Now if any one farther add to what hath been offer'd, that this Body, whose Motion is so very swift, is much greater than the whole Globe of Earth, and that so very expeditious a Motion of so huge and vast a Body, is perform'd without either Intermiſſion or Fatigue; and if God should so order it, shall be so to Eternal Ages; surely if he is not more stupid, and more insensible than a Stock, he cannot but admire the infinite Power of the Creator. Good reason therefore had the Preacher to call this Sun, *A wonderful Instrument, the work of the most High, and Him great indeed that made it.*

C H A P. III.

THE efficacy and force of Light, and Heat, remains to be spoken to, of which *David* saith, *There is nothing hid from the heat thereof.* *Psalm 19.* This one Luminous Body, plac'd in the midst of the World, gives Light to all the Stars, to the whole Aery Element, to all Seas, and the whole Globle of Earth; and by its enlivening Heat, makes all things that spring out of the Earth, all Corn and Plants to become green and leavy; brings all Fruits to Maturity, from one end of the World to the other. It also extends its Influence beneath the Earth, and produces all sorts of Metals. Wherefore *St. James* in the beginning of his Epistle, compares God himself with the Sun, saying, *Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* *James 1.* The Sun indeed is the Parent of corporeal Lights, but God the Father of spiritual: But in three particulars there is a very great Inequality betwixt God and the Sun. For first, the Sun, in order to replenish the whole Earth with Light and Heat, must move from one place to another; but God being whole in all places, has no need of such Change and Shifting; therefore *St. James* saith, *With whom there is no change.* In the second place, the Sun, by reason of its continual exchange of place, makes Day to some, and leaves others in

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in Darkneſs, ſhines in one place, and diſappears in another. But God, without Motion, is every where preſent, therefore St. James adds, *With him is no ſhadow of change.* Laſtly, from the Sun, the Father of corporeal Light, all the Gifts and Benefits which come immediately from the Earth, are produc'd, which is a great commendation of it. Theſe are Benefits; but neither the moſt excellent, nor perfect, no, they are trivial, temporary, perſhable, that make not the Poſſeſſors good, and ſuch as any one may abuſe, and which indeed the generality of Mankind make only Inſtruments of their perdition. But from God the Father of ſpiritual Lights, all the moſt excellent and perfect Gifts deſcend, ſuch as make the Poſſeſſor thoroughly good and happy, and which conduct him that cheriſheth and retains them, to a State of true Felicity, *i. e.* to a State where is Abſence of all things that are Evil, and Preſence of all things that are Good.

Inquire now, my Soul, what thoſe good
 " and perfect Gifts are, which are from above,
 " and come from the Father of Lights, that
 when thou haſt found them, thou mayſt
 think them worth thy Concern, and endeavour
 to the utmoſt of thy Power to become poſſeſſ'd
 of them. But there is no need of making any
 long or laborious ſearch after them, the very
 nature of the Sun will ſufficiently inform thee
 what they are; for the Sun performs all things
 by Light and Heat; theſe are the Gifts which
 the Parent of corporeal Light and Heat conſers.
 And in like manner, thoſe good and perfect
 Gifts which

which are from above, and come down from God, the true Father of Lights, are the Light of Wisdom, and the right application, or disposing of Charity. "The Light of Wisdom," which makes a Man truly wise, and which no one can use amiss, and which brings us to the Fountain of Wisdom, which is plac'd in our Country which is above, is that which teaches us to slight things temporal, and to make great account of eternal: That instructs us not to put our Hope or Confidence in uncertain Riches, but in the living God: That teaches us not to take the place of Exile, for our Country; nor to be in love with the state of our Pilgrimage, but to bear it patiently: And lastly, that teaches us quietly to endure this present Life with the hazards and temptations to which we are frequently expos'd, but to long for Death, because, *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.*

Now the right Application or Disposition of Charity, what is it, but to love God, who is the End of all our Desires, without any Bounds, or Measure; and to love other things, which are only Means to this End, moderately, and within compass, that is, so far as is necessary to attain our End, which is Everlasting Life? Amongst all Mankind, there is not certainly so much as one to be found, who inverts the Order, with respect to Bodily care, so as to love Health moderately, and a bitter Potion immoderately, as knowing, that one is the End, and the other but the Means. How comes it then that so many, who would pass for wise Men, observe no measure in heaping up Riches, in gratifying

gratifying the Lusts of the Flesh, and in mounting up to the pinnacle of Honour, as if such things were the End of the Heart of Man : But in loving of God, and in the search after Eternal Felicity, do confine themselves to so narrow a compass, as if they were only means to the End, not the End of all means? The reason is only this ; they are Worldly-wise, but want that wisdom which is from above, and comes from the Father of Lights, and because their Love is not fixt upon proper Objects, and therefore is not true Love, which cannot but be so fixt ; but are full of Desires, which are not from the Father, but from the World.

Thou therefore, my Soul, whilst thou art Pilgrimizing here below, and at a distance from thy Country ; whilst thou conversest amongst Enemies, who are always plotting and contriving against true Wisdom, and true Charity, who put Craft for Wisdom, and Lust for Love ; pray heartily with Sighs unto the Father of Lights, that he will cause those good and perfect Gifts, the Light of true Wisdom, and the Ardency of rightly directed Charity, to descend into thine Heart, that being replete herewith, thou mayest inoffensively run the ways of God's Commandments, and arrive at that Country, where the Wise and Charitable drink at the very Fountain of Wisdom, and feed on the sincere Milk of Charity.

C H A P. IV.

I Am now come to the time of Night, in which the Heavens, by the help of the Moon and Stars, advance us nearer to God. For thus saith *David*, *I will consider the Heavens, even the Works of thy Hands, the Moon and Stars which thou hast ordained.* Could we see Heaven it self, the Prophet would not say, (by way of Explication of what he had before laid down) *The Moon and Stars which thou hast ordained.* And were our Senses indeed able to reach the very Heaven, or could we by certain reason find out its Nature and Qualities, this, no doubt, would give us a notable Lift towards our Creator. We know indeed, there have been some, who from the motion of the Stars, have defin'd the nature of Heaven to be a Quintessence, simple, incorruptible, and which perpetually moves round: but neither are we ignorant, that others would have Heaven to be the Element of Fire, which moves not round, nor is incorruptible, with respect to its parts: but we are not upon the enquiry after Opinion, but of certain Science, or the Doctrine of Faith, that from thence we may contrive, what will infallibly contribute to our farther knowledge of God. We will therefore with the Prophet content our selves to erect an Instrument of Ascension from the Moon and Stars which we behold, as we have just now done from the Sun, which is the Light, and Prince, of other Lights.

Steps of Ascension to God.

The Moon hath two properties, which may be useful to us, in our Ascension and Approaches to God. The first is, that the nearer it advances towards the Sun, so much the more it is enlightned in its upper part, which looks towards Heaven; and obscured in the lower part, which has respect to the Earth. And when it is directly under the Sun, and wholly in Conjunction with it, then it is altogether bright towards Heaven, and dark towards Earth: and on the contrary, when it is in opposition to the Sun, it appears all over bright to those who inhabit the Earth, but altogether dark in its upper part, which they behold who dwell above.

This property of the Moon may be a notable Admonition, or Example to Mankind, and inform us, how solicitous we ought to be of approaching to God the true Father of Lights, of being in subjection to, and in conjunction with Him, the Moon represents Man, the Sun God. When the Moon is in opposition to the Sun, then, with a Light borrowed from the Sun, it looks only upon the Earth, and as it were, turns its back to Heaven: whence also it appears very beautiful to the Earthly Inhabitants, but very ill-favour'd to those above. Just so, poor Mortals, when they have departed a great way from God, as that prodigal Son, when he went from his Father, and rambled into a far Country, make no other use of the Light of Reason, which they have received from the Father of Lights, but only to pore upon Earth, and turning God out of their thoughts, they muse only upon Earth, con-
fine

fine their love to Earth, and are wholly taken up, in procuring the good things thereof, and for so doing, are applauded as sagacious and fortunate Men, by the Children of this World : but by those, who can better judge, that is, by the Cœlestial Inhabitants, are adjudg'd to be poor, and naked, and deform'd, wretched and miserable. Now on the contrary, the Moon when being in Conjunction with the Sun, is perfectly in subjection to it, is then altogether bright in the upper part, has respect only to Heaven, and as it were, turns its back to Earth, and utterly disappears to human Eyes. Even so when the Wicked begins to return to his Duty to God, and by a through Conversion subjects himself by true Humility to God, the true Sun of Souls ; and is in Conjunction with him by Charity, then he fully complies with the Apostle's Advice, *in seeking the things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God, and minds heavenly, not earthly things,* and is then slighted and contemn'd by the foolish, and accounted as already dead. For he that is truly subject to God, is mortify'd to the World, and his Life is hid with Christ in God : *But when Christ who is his life shall appear, then shall he also appear with Christ in Glory,* as the same Apostle there adds. Colof. 3.

And this is the reason (as St. Augustin observes in his Epistle to *Januarius*) that the Passover of the Lord, as well in the old, as new Law, could not be celebrated till the full Moon was over, that is, till the Moon which at full, is in Opposition to, begins to return to a Conjunction with, the Sun. For God was pleas'd by this Cœlestial Sign to de-

clare, that Man, who by his Iniquity is in Opposition to God, begins his Conversion to him by the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord, and hastens to his Favour, and to an Union with him, by the Merits of Jesus Christ.

27. But thou, my Soul, if by the gracious Assistance of God, thou happenest to find thy self in subjection to the Father of Lights, and in a blessed Conjunction with him through ardent Charity, follow not the Guise of Fools, who as *Ecclesiasticus* witnesseth, change like the Moon; but propose Wise-men to thy Imitation, who are stedfast as the Sun. The Moon makes not greater haste to be in Conjunction, than when she is so, to be in Opposition again; but thou, if thou art wise, forsake not the Grace which thou hast once attain'd; retreat not from it, but keep thy ground; thou wilt no where find any thing that will stand thee in so much stead; nor canst thou be assur'd if thou voluntarily recedest, whether ever thou shalt be re-admitted; for he that hath promised Pardon to the Penitent, and Grace to them that return, hath neither promised thee a longer continuance of life, nor the gift of Repentance. Turn boldly then thy Back to the Earth, and fix thine Eyes upon thy Sun; there let thy Acquiescence be, there thy Delight, and there settle thy Abode. Say with the Apostle, *It is good for us to be here*: And with Ignatius the Martyr, *It is better for me to live with Christ, than to be Emperor of the Universe*. Nor be thou concern'd at the Censures of Worldlings, for he is approved, not whom the World, but whom God, commends.

CHAP.

C H A P. V.

THE Moon has another Property, which represents God's Behaviour towards his Elect. For the Moon hath dominion over the Night, as the Sun hath over the Day, as *Moses* tells us in *Genesis*, and *David* in the *Psalms*. But the Sun enlightens the whole Day with continual Brightness; but the Moon illuminates the Night, sometimes with much, sometimes with a very little light, sometimes leaves us to the disconsolateness of utter Darknesh. Thus God, like the Sun, illustrates the holy Angels, and the Souls of the Blessed, with continual Splendor, who have Day without Interruption, (for there is not, as *St. John* tells us in his *Revelations*, any Night in those Regions.) But in the night of this our pilgrimage and exile, *wherein we walk by faith*, 2 Cor. 5. and not by sight, and attend to sacred Writ, as to a light that shineth in a dark place, according to that of *St. Peter*; God, like the Moon, now and then makes us a Visit, by illuminating our Hearts; and sometimes leaves us in the darkness of desolation. Nor yet, oughtest thou, my Soul, to be very much dejected, if no light of Consolation shine into thee; nor to be much transported, if after an Interval of Obscurity, the Light of Consolation and Devotion break in upon thee: for in the night of this our perigrination, God doth not carry it towards us as the Sun, but like the Moon. Nor doth God only appear to us

little ones, and Christians of a lower form, like the Moon, one while replenished with the Light of Consolation, another while as devoid of all Light, leaving us in Horror and thick Darkness; for even the Apostle Paul, that Vessel of Election, who being wrapt up into the third Heaven, heard unspeakable words, such as no Man may utter; one while

2 Cor. 7. declares, *I am full of consolation, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation*; another while he breaks out into Sighs and Lamentations, saying, *I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death.* And in his

2 Cor. 1. second Epistle to the Corinthians, *We would not brethren have you ignorant of our trouble, which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure above strength, insomuch that we despair'd even of Life.* And St. Chrysostome to the same purpose acquaints us, that this is God's behaviour towards the Saints in general, that he neither deals out to them continued Joys, nor Sorrows, but makes the life of the Righteous an admirable Checker of Prosperity and Adversity. And so much of the Moon.

C H A P. VI.

AMongst the Ornaments of Heaven, the Stars remain to be consider'd, which *Ecclesiasticus* calls the Beauty of Heaven, but

presently adds, *The Lord on high enlightning the world.* For all the beauty of the Stars, yea, Ecclus 43.

of the Sun and Moon, is nothing but an Efflux from the Father of Lights : Nor is it the Sun by Day, nor the Moon and Stars by Night, that enlighten the World, but 'tis God who dwells on high, that makes the Sun, Moon, and Stars, Instruments of conveying Light to the World. *It is God, as Baruch saith,* Baruch 3.

that sendeth forth light, and it goeth ; calleth it again, and it obeyeth him with fear. The stars shined in their watches, and rejoiced, when he calleth them they say here we are ; and so with chearfulness they shewed light to him that made them.

By which is signified to us the infinite Power of God, that could in a moment, with the greatest ease imaginable, produce, adorn, and set on working such vast and glorious bodies. What with us is to Call, with God is to Create with a Word : for he calls those things which are not, and by Calling, gives them Being. And for the Stars to say, lo ! here we are ; is nothing else, but presently to start up into Being, at the Voice of him that commanded, and to enter upon Action. And to shew Light with Chearfulness unto him that made them, is to pay Obedience to their Creator with such readiness and facility, as if they had the greatest complacency in Obedience. But there is one thing observable in the Stars, which calls for the greatest admiration, that whereas their Motion is swift almost beyond Imagination, and that Motion at no time suspended, and they run in a ring, some faster, some slower, yet so exactly observe their measure, and proportion, one

Job. 38.

with another, that from thence results a most harmonious and delightful Concert. Of this Concert God speaketh in the Book of Job, when he saith, *Who shall declare the ordinances of Heaven, and who shall make the harmony thereof to sleep?* The Harmony he speaks of, is not of Words or Sounds, which are understood by the Ears of the Body; but an Harmony of Proportions in the Motions of the Stars, which is apprehended by the ear of our Understanding. For the Stars of the Firmament, all at the same time run over the whole Circuit of Heaven with equal speed, in the space of twenty four hours; but those seven Stars which are called Planets, or Wandring Stars, have different Motions assign'd them, some faster, some slower; so that the Stars of the Firmament seem to imitate the Bass, (to use familiar terms) and the Planets to make a perpetual and most delightful Counter-tenor. But these are things above our Sphere, and this Concert sounds best in their Ears, who having their Residence in Heaven, understand the reason of these Motions. And since the Stars, still observing Distance and Proportion, are never tir'd by continual turning round, they seem to lead everlasting delightful Dances over the Heavens, like honourable Virgins, well skill'd in the Art of dancing.

But thou, my Soul, advance, if thou canst, a Step higher, and from the exceeding great Brightness of the Sun, the Beauty of the Moon, from the multitude and variety of the other Lights; from the admirable Harmony of the Heavens, and the most delightful

ful Dances of the Stars ; consider what it will be to see God above the Heavens, that Sun, who dwells in Light inaccessible ; to behold that Virgin, the Queen of Heaven, who is beautiful as the Moon, and makes glad the whole City of God ; to behold the Quires and Orders of many thousands of Angels, who adorn the highest Heavens with Brightness and Number surpassing the Stars : to view the Souls of holy Men intermixt with the Quires of Angels, as Planets interspers'd with the Stars of the Firmament. And what it will be to have our Ears entertain'd with Songs of Praise, and an everlasting Halleluja most sweetly sounding in the Streets of that City from harmonious Voices. For hence it will come to pass, that thou wilt not greatly admire the Beauty of the visible Heavens, and that all things below will appear next to nothing, and by consequence, unworthy any great Regard or Esteem.

THE

T H E
Eighth Step.

From the Consideration of the Rational Soul.

C H A P. I.

WE have hitherto been surveying all such things as we term corporeal, whilst we endeavour by Contemplation to ascend from Creatures to the Creator. Now we find the Souls of Men superiour in Dignity to all Bodies, and know they have a place assign'd them (tho' the meanest) amongst Spiritual Substances, betwixt which and God, we are not acquainted with any Medium, save only the Hierarchies and the Orders of Angels.

But further, the human Soul hath so great a similitude with God the Creator, that I know not any way, whereby we may more easily attain to the Knowledge of God, than from the Consideration of our own Soul. Therefore God will have Man to be inexcusable, if he remain without the knowledge of God, when by the concomitancy of Divine Assistance, he may easily attain to it, by acquainting himself with his own Soul.

In

In the first place then, the Soul of Man is a Spirit; for so the holy Fathers expound those words in *Genesis*, *The Lord God made man* Gen. 3. *of the dust of the earth, and breath'd into his nostrils the breath of life.* And that of *Tobit*, *Command my Spirit to be taken from me.* As also that of *Ecclesiastes*, *The body returns to the earth* Eccles 12. *whence it was, and the spirit to God who gave it.* But although the word Spirit doth agree also to the Wind, for we read in the *Psalms*, *Spiritus procellarum*, *The stormy Wind*; and in the Gospel, *Spiritus ubi vult spirat*, *The Wind bloweth where it listeth.* Yet doubtless, this *Spiritus procellarum* is a very thin Body, which by reason of its extreme Subtlety, doth more nearly resemble spiritual nature, than any other body whatsoever. But the Soul of Man is properly a Spirit, not a Body, neither is it produc'd from matter, but is created of God. In which point Christians are generally agreed.

Here then commenceth the Excellency of the Soul, and its Similitude with God. For God is a Spirit, as our Saviour plainly declares, John 4. *God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and truth.* But though God is a Spirit, and the human Soul a Spirit; yet God is a Spirit uncreated, and the Creator; the Soul a Spirit created: from whence arises an infinite distance, betwixt that Spirit which is a Soul, and that which is God. Therefore as much as the Soul has cause to rejoice, that it is in the rank of Spiritual Substance, and by Nature more dignified and ennobled than Heaven and the Luminaries thereof; so much reason has it to
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be humbled, and prostrate it self before the Creator, because it was made of nothing, and of it self is nothing.

CHAP. II.

SEcondly, the human Soul, as being a simple Spirit, is also Immortal, for it is incapable of either being Divided or Annihilated. But in this regard likewise, as much reason as it has to glory for having so great advantage above brutish Animals, whose Souls perish with the Body, so much cause hath it to admire, and stand amazed at, the Excellency of its Creator, who is not only Immortal, but Everlasting too. For there was a time when the Human Soul had no Being; and that it ever had, is wholly owing to the Will of God: and if God so will, can again be reduc'd to nothing, though it has no Principles of Corruption in it; therefore the Apostle *1 Tim. 6.* did rightly affirm that *God only hath Immortality*; for He alone is incapable of dissolution, either by violence or accident, or any other way, forasmuch as he is Being it self, Life it self, and the Fountain of Being and Life.

CHAP. III.

THirdly, the Human Soul is endued with the light of Understanding; for it doth not only know Colours, and Tastes, and Smells,

Smells, and Sounds, and Heat, and Cold, and Soft, and Hard, and the like things, which are the proper Objects of corporeal Sense ; but can also judge of Substance, and not only of things singular, but also universal ; and is not only acquainted with things present, but can make a guess at Futurities, and by its discursive Faculty, mounts above the Heavens, dives into the bottomless deep, by Causes finds out Effects, and by Effects runs back to Causes, and finally by the Strength of its Understanding approacheth to God himself, who dwells in Light unaccessible. This is the Light which St. John mentions in his Gospel, *He was the* John 1. *true light, which enlightneth every Man that cometh into the World.* And David in his Psalms, *Lord lift thou up the light of thy Countenance upon* Psal. 4. *us ; and elsewhere he advises, Be not as the Horse and Mule, which have no Understanding.* Great is this Dignity of the Soul, by which Man becomes like unto God, and unlike Brutes : and hence Man not only may, but ought, to infer the Greatness, and Excellency of the Lord his Creator. For the Soul is endued with the Light of Understanding, but God is Light it self, and Understanding it self. The Soul runs backwards and forwards, from Causes to Effects, and from Effects to Causes, and in so doing makes a laborious search after Knowledge ; God by one pure Act of Intuition perfectly knows all things at once. The Soul understands the things which are in being, and therefore its knowledge depends on things : God by understanding, causes things to be, and therefore the being of things depends on the knowledge of God. The Soul,

Soul, after a sort, makes a guess at things future; God has always as clear and distinct a View of what is to come, as he has of things that are past, or present. The Soul stands in need of many things, that it may exercise its understanding Faculties, such as the Object, Species, Fancy, and the like. God wants nothing, for his Essence is all things to him, and by consequence, 'tis Understanding it self. To conclude, the Soul, whilst imprison'd in the Body, is not only incapable of seeing God, but can neither see Angels, nor it self, nor doth it properly see any Substance, though corporeal; is mistaken in many things, is ignorant in most, in very many doth but opine, hath knowledge but of very few. But there is nothing whereof God is ignorant; about which he conjectures, or is under any Mistake or Fallacy, *for all things*, as the Apostle saith, *are naked and bare before his Eyes*. If therefore Man makes so great account of his Knowledge, as to be puffed up with it, as the Apostle saith, how much ought he to admire the Knowledge of his Creator, to which all our Knowledge being compared, will appear to be Ignorance, not Knowledge?

Heb. 4.

1 Cor. 8.

CHAP. IV.

Fourthly, there is in the Soul of Man another sort of Knowledge, which is not conversant in Speculation, but Action. Hence it is that we have so many Philosophical
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Treatises of Vice and Vertue; so many Laws of Princes, and prudent Decrees of Lawyers; so many Institutions, and Exercitations to help us to the Art of living well. Wherein is discover'd great Strength, and Clearness of Reason in Man, and by which our Nature is very highly dignified above that of Brutes. But all this is nothing to that eternal Law, which resides in the Mind of the Creator, from which, as from an overflowing Fountain, all Laws, and all Ordinances have proceeded: for, as St. James saith in his Epistle, *There is one Law-giver and Judge, that is God.* James 4. He is Truth, and Righteousness, and Wisdom, by whom Kings reign, and Princes decree Judgment. Prov. 8. Therefore thou wilt never be Master of the Art of living well, and happily, till being admitted into Christ's School, who is the only true Master, thou hast learned from his Precepts and Examples, that Righteousness, which exceedeth the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees; I may add, that of the Philosophers too; the end of which Righteousness, is *Charity out of a pure Heart, and of a good Conscience, and of Faith unfeigned.*

C H A P. V.

Fifthly, the Soul of Man possesses a third sort of Knowledge, which consists in contriving and making things Ingeniously and Cunningly. Spiders indeed can hang up their Webs, Birds can build their Nests, and Bees make Honey, and Foxes find out Holes which

which serve them for Houses : but these Creatures by a certain Instinct of Nature, make one and the same thing, after one and the same way. But the Soul of Man, endued with Reason and Judgment, hath found out innumerable Arts, by which he commands the rest of Creatures, and lords it over them whether they will or no : Wings are insignificant to Birds ; the deepest Waters secure not Fishes ; the great Strength of Lions and Bears doth not help them ; the Fierceness of Horses and Mules avails them nothing ; nor doth Swiftnes deliver Stags and Roes : for very Boys with Snares, Birdlime, and Nets, catch Birds ; and Fishes with Hooks and Drags : But Men by cunning and Art have found out a way to inclose Bears, and Lions, in Cages of Iron, and carry 'em about ; to hamper Boars and Stags in Cords, or dispatch them with Instruments of Iron ; to tame Horses and Mules, and make them obedient to their Command. What shall I say of the Art of Navigation ? What clearness of Wit did appear in the Soul of Man, who made Huge Ships, laden with vast Burdens, not only run with Oars as with Feet, but to fly with Sails, as with Wings, through the liquid deep ? What shall I say of Husbandry ? Who can but stand amazed at the Wit of Man, that looks upon, and considers, Corn, Vineyards, Orchards, Fish-ponds, and various Rivulets forc'd against Nature to water Gardens, and moisten the Fields ? What shall we say of Architecture ? Who is not seiz'd with admiration that surveys Palaces, Temples, Cities, Towers, Amphitheaters, Pyramids and Obelisks ?

Obelisks? I omit the Arts of Painting and Carving, by which there is sometimes so lively a representation made of human Faces, or other things, with Colours on a Board, or with a carving Instrument in Marble, that they seem to be real, and neither Painted nor Carved. I likewise pass over other Arts contriv'd by the Wit of Man, either for our Necessity, Conveniency, or Pleasure, being so many, that it would be endless to enumerate them.

Well then, my Soul, be not backward in expressing thy Gratitude to God, who hath thus distinguish'd thee from the nature of other Animals; but withal, lift up the eyes of thy mind to the same Creator, who is the true Fountain of that Wit and Wisdom which contrive all things, and bring them to perfection. All thy Skill, and all thy artful Contrivances, are but an Efflux and Emanation from that Fountain. And if thou standest in Admiration at the Wit of Man, that hath learn'd by Art and Industry to get the dominion over irrational Creatures, how much rather shouldst thou admire God, whom all things, both with, and without, Life, do serve and obey? And if thou accountest it a mighty matter, that Man hath invented so many Arts relating to Navigation, Agriculture, and Architecture, why should it not seem much rather wonderful, that God by his Wisdom hath founded the Heavens, the Earth, and Seas, and has them all at his beck and command? And if thou art amazed at the Skill of Painters, and the Art of representing a Face to the life in Marble, why

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art thou not rather astonish'd at the Art of thy Creator, who form'd a real and living Man out of Clay, and built a true and living Woman out of the Rib of Man? Especially if thou farther considerest, that Men can do nothing without divine co-operation, and that God has no Coadjutor or Assistant.

C H A P. VI.

Sixthly, the Soul of Man is endued with Freedom of Will, which is common to him with God and Angels, and whereby he is principally distinguish'd from other Creatures. This is a noble Priviledge, and singular Excellency. But the Liberty that is in God the Creator, so far excels that in the Soul of Man, that ours compar'd with the Divine, appears not to be so much as the shadow of it. First, the Liberty of Man's Will is infirm and feeble, readily inclining to make choice of things evil and hurtful: the Divine Will is fortified beyond a possibility of submitting, or so much as inclining to Evil. For as to be capable of dying, is the Infirmary of a Mortal Body; to be incapable, is the Health and Vigour of a Glorify'd Body; so to be able to commit Sin, is the infirmity of Free-will; not to be able to sin, will be the strength of the same Will, when God shall confer that upon us in Heaven by Grace, which He himself doth always possess by Nature. Besides, our Freedom of Will is such a Freedom, as can will, and not

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will, as also that can will, and can be unwilling ; but is not able to accomplish what it would have done, or to hinder what it would not have done, no not in its self ; how much less in others ? Hear what Lamentation the Apostle makes in his Epistle to the Romans, *The good that I would, that do I not ; Rom. 7. but the evil that I would not, that I do.* And who amongst us doth not experience the same ? I have a mind to pray with attention to God, and I injoin my Imagination, whilst I apply my self to Prayer, not to ramble, nor draw me to muse on other things : and yet I cannot keep it to its Duty ; and whilst I am a little remiss in the matter, I find my self deluded by my Imagination, and fallen from praying, to the minding of other things. I have a mind not to covet, nor to extend my Anger beyond the Limits of Reason, and by virtue of Freedom of Will, I lay my Commands on my Irascible or Concupiscible Faculties, (which ought to submit to Reason) that they wholly give up themselves to Reason's dominion, and that they suffer not themselves to be any ways seduc'd by the Senses of the Body ; yet I often find my self disobey'd, and that left undone, which I would have done, and that done, which I would not. But what is very strange, and very much to be pityed, the Mind commands the Body, and it presently obeys ; the Mind commands its self, and finds resistance. " From whence, " saith St. *Augustin*, comes this monstrous unaccountable thing ? The Mind commands " that the Hand be in motion, and there is such " a Compliance, that you can hardly distin-

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"guish betwixt the Order and Execution:
 "and yet the Mind and Hand are two things.
 "The Mind commands, that the Mind assent,
 "and tho' the Commander and the Com-
 "manded are the same, yet nothing is done.
 "But the case is this, the Mind assents but in
 "part, and therefore doth not peremptorily
 "command. There is then no Unaccounta-
 "bleness in the matter; the Reason lies in
 "the Distemperature of the Mind, which is
 "so clog'd with ill Habits and Customs, that
 "it doth not wholly mount upwards, carried
 "upon the wings of Truth. But the Freedom
 "of the Divine Will is invested with such ple-
 "nary and absolute Power, that we find writ-
 "ten concerning it, *He hath done whatsoever*
 Pfal. 114. "pleased him. And in *Esther*, *There is none who*
 "can resist thy will.

Wherefore, my Soul, if thou art wise, for-
 bear to glory of the Power of Free-will, till
 thou shalt arrive at the glorious Liberty of the
 Sons of God, when thy heavenly Physician
 shall have healed all thy Infirmities, and sa-
 tisfied thy Desires with good things. But in
 the mean time sigh continually, and say to
 Pfal. 103. God with the Prophet, *Be thou my succour, O*
Lord, and leave me not, nor forsake me. And
 repeat what thou frequently dost every day,
 not faintly, drowsily, and customarily, but
 with vigilant Attention and Heartiness: *Make*
 Pfal. 70. *haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste, O Lord,*
to help me.

C H A P. VII.

SEVENTHLY, the Soul of Man hath a Rational Will, which cannot only desire things present, particular, and corporeal, such as Brutes desire; but also good things that are Absent, General, and Spiritual, which are discover'd to us by Faith or Reason, and by consequence, that supreme and infinite Good, which is God himself. And hence it is that Man is capable of great Virtues, especially of that of Charity, the Queen of all. Brute Animals have love, but 'tis only a love of Concupiscence; the love of Friendship they know nothing of. But thou, my Soul, art capacitated by God for that Gift, which is the Fountain of all Gifts, that is of most bright and beautiful Charity, which so unites thee with God the Supreme Good, that thou abidest in him, and he in thee: *For God is love, and he that abideth in love, abideth in God, and God in him.* But if this be so great a good in a created Will, how great must that good be wherewith the Divine Will is replenish'd? The Will of God alone is capable of infinite Love, with which the infinite Goodness of God deserves to be loved. Nor doth this Will stand in need of Virtues, nor doth it want direction from the Understanding: for that and the Understanding are the same thing, as Wisdom and Charity in God are the same.

C H A P VIII.

THE Soul of Man is in an human Body, but in a far different manner than the Souls of Brutes are in their Bodies. The Souls of Brutes are compos'd of Matter, and reach to the extension of the Body, so that part of their Soul is in part of their Body, and the whole in the whole. But the Soul of Man being a Spirit incapable of division, is after a wonderful manner intire and whole in the whole, and intire and whole in every part. And though it fills the whole Body, yet takes up no room in the Body : and when the Body encreaseth, the Soul doth not encrease, only begins to be where it was not before : and if a Member be cut off, or perish, the Soul is not diminished, nor dwindles, but ceases to be in that Member in which it was before, without being hurt or maimed. This is a true Representation of God's Existence in things created. For God is an indivisible Spirit, and yet fills the whole World, and every part thereof ; neither takes he up any room, and is whole in the whole World, and whole in every part of the World. And when a new Creature is produc'd, God begins to be in it, nor is he moved. And when any Creature happens to be destroy'd, or to die, God is not destroy'd, nor dies, but ceases to be there, and that without changing place. Therefore there is in these respects, a resemblance betwixt God and the Soul. But yet in many respects (as it is fit it should be)

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God has very much the Pre-eminence: for the Soul, that it may be in the Body, and that it may govern, and actuate the Body, doth necessarily require a bodily form, and to be so conjoin'd with it, that of Soul and Body there be made one Man. God needs not that there should be any Form, or Soul of the World; nor that one Substance should be made of Himself and the World. But this happens to him by his Immensity, to be in all places: by his indivisible Unity, to be whole in all places: by his Omnipotency, that he governs all things, supports all things, and moves all things. But farther, the Soul, tho' 'tis said to be in the whole Body, yet is not properly in any parts but in those that are animated, or living parts; therefore 'tis not in the Humours, in the Nails, in perished or dead Members. God is absolutely in all things, not only in corporeal, but also in spiritual; nor is it indeed possible that any thing should be, and God not be in it. Besides, the Soul is no where but in its own Body, and that of very small Dimensions, and in which all the Parts are tyed up together: for if any Part were separated from the rest, the Soul could not be in it: but God is whole in this Universe of things, though vastly great, and its Parts, though contiguous, are not ty'd together: and though several other Worlds should be created, God would be in them all. For upon this account it is written, *The Heaven, 2 Chr. 6. and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain thee.* For if another Heaven, and another Earth were made, He would also be in them; yea, though new Earths and new Heavens were

infinitely multiplied, He would fill them all; and there would not be any thing in which he should not be.

C H A P. IX.

Ninthly, the Soul of Man, besides those things which have been said, contains within it self, an Image, though but an obscure one, of the most Sacred Trinity, both as it hath a comprehensive Memory, the Faculty of Understanding, and of loving: and also, because the Mind by Understanding, forms a sort of Word of its own, and from the Mind and Word proceeds Love: because that which is known by the Mind, and represented by the Word, as good, is presently beloved, and desir'd by the Will. But yet God the Father in a far more eminent and divine manner, begets God the Word; and the Father and the Word breath forth God the Holy Ghost, who is living and true Love, and the living Fountain of all chaste Love. And for this reason the Mystery of the Trinity surpasses the natural means of gaining Knowledge; nor can the most learned Philosopher come to understand it, without Supernatural Assistance. For the Soul of Man produces the Word and Love, which are not Substances, but Accidents, and therefore are not Persons: but God the Father begets the Word of the same Substance with himself, and the Father and the Word breath forth the Holy Ghost of the same Substance also with Them-
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selves ; from whence the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost, are rightly termed three Persons. But farther, the Soul of Man produces a Word which continues not long, and the Will produces Love which is not lasting : but God the Father begets the Word which is Eternal, and the Father and the Word breath forth the Holy Ghost, who is also Eternal : for God cannot be without his Word, and his Spirit. But to make an end ; by one word the Soul of Man represents one thing, and therefore is fain to multiply Words, not only those of the Mind, but those of the Mouth too ; and the Will of Man must produce many Acts of Love, if it will love many things : but God by one Word, speaks all truth, and by one only act of Love, doth love all that is good.

C H A P. X.

L Astly, this is also proper to the Human Soul, that whilst it is in the Body, tho' it be neither seen, nor heard, nor moved, and is scarcely perceived to be in it, and when it departs from the Body, nothing seems wanting to the Body ; yet it supplies it with Sense, Motion, Discourse, Subsistence, Beauty, Strength, and with all the good it enjoys. For how comes it about, that Man, whilst living, doth see, hear, discourse, walk about, subsist ; that he is brisk, beautiful, and lovely, but from the Soul that is in him ? And how doth it happen, that when he is dead, he neither

ther sees, nor hears, nor discourfes, nor moves, but lies in a frightful Pofture, is become ufelefs, and not to be endur'd, but that the Soul is departed, from whence all its Good was derived? So thy God, O my Soul, whilst he lives in thee by his Grace, doth make thee fee what things Faith presents to thee, and to hear what the Lord fpeaketh in thee, and to walk to the Heavenly *Jerufalem*, in the way of his Commandments, and to addrefs thyfelf in Prayer unto God, and to thy Neighbour in holy Exhortations; tis He that makes thee to be ftedefaft and immoveable in good Works, and to fight manfully againft invifible Enemies, and to appear beautiful in the Eyes of the invifible God, and his Angels. But beware, left the Grace of God departing from thee, which is the Life of thy Soul, thou fhould'ft feel thofe Loffes which the firft Death inflicts, and then be dragg'd to the fecond Death, from which there is allowed no Refurrection. O that the Lord would open the Eyes of thine Understanding, that thou mighteft behold the glorious Beauty, and transcendent Brightnefs of a Soul acceptable to God, and united to him by true Charity, what a favourable Afpect God cafts upon it, what Mansions he prepares for it, what glorious Promifes he has made it, and how it is long'd for by Angels, and other bleffed Spirits! Sure I am, thou wouldeft then carefully preserve the Beauty of thy Soul, and not fuffer any finful Blemifh to deform it: and if any fuch thing fhould happen, thou wouldeft never be at reft, till with Floods of penitential Tears thou hadft wafh'd it off. And if by the fame Grace of God,

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the eyes of thy Understanding were open'd, so that thou couldst see how great the Filthiness of a sinful Soul is, how unsavoury in God's Nostrils, such as of a putrefy'd Carcass; and what an Abhorrence God and the Holy Angels have to look upon it, though perhaps it be a Tenant to a beautiful Body, finely adorned, and very amiable in the Eyes of Men; without all doubt, thou wouldest be under such dreadful Apprehensions that no Temptation should prevail with thee to blemish thy Soul, or having blemish'd it, to continue in that polluted State.

THE

T H E
Ninth Step.

From the Consideration of Angels.

C H A P. I.

WE are now arrived at the highest Step of Ascension to God, from the Consideration of created Substances, for of such none is Superior to Angelical. We will therefore consider Angels, first, with respect to the Excellency of Nature ; next as to the height of Grace ; and lastly with regard to those Offices which they execute. For it is not my purpose to treat of any Point relating to those glorious Beings, but what tends to elevate the Mind unto God. Now an Angel compar'd with the Rational and Human Soul, may properly be term'd a perfect Soul : as the Soul likewise may be call'd an imperfect Angel. For thus the Prophet speaks concerning Man, with respect to his Soul, *Thou hast made him a little lower than the Angels.* For an Angel is an entire, and compleatly Spiritual Substance ; the Human Soul but in Part, and imperfectly so, as being the

Psal. 8.

the Form of the Body, and from hence Part of the Man. Therefore an Angel is altogether Spirit, Man in part Spirit, in part Flesh ; or partly an Angel, and partly a Brute : as if one should say, an Angel is compos'd wholly of Gold, Man is made up part of Gold, and part of Clay. Wherefore that is true which the Prophet saith, *Man is a little lower than the Angels* ; and this is likewise true, that the Soul of Man, because it is part of the Man, is a little lower than an Angel. From whence it follows that an Angel is more like to God, than either Man, or the Soul of Man, because God is a Spirit, not a Body, nor the Form of a Body. But tho' an Angel bears a greater Resemblance to God, it doth not hence follow, that God is not a Spirit infinitely Superior to the Dignity of Angels ; for God is a Spirit uncreated, eternal, unmeasurable, who only hath Power, Wisdom, Goodness, and Excellency. Wherefore, my Soul, if thou art ready to own that the Angelical Nature deserves thy Admiration, how much more oughtest thou to admire, and stand amazed at, the Nature of God, which so far surmounts the Dignity of Angels, that there is not the least room for Comparison ?

C H A P. II.

BUT not only in Nature or Substance, may an Angel be term'd a perfect Man, and Man an imperfect Angel, but also in Understanding and Knowledge. For Man, or
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the Human Soul, is at great Pains in attaining to the knowledge of things, as being under necessity of using the Ministry of the Senses, and by running backwards, and forwards, from Effects to Causes, and from Causes to Effects, to pick up Knowledge by piece Meal, and from hence also, is frequently encountred with Doubts, is often under egregious Mistakes, and seldom arriveth at certainty of Knowledge. But an Angel by one view, has an insight into a thing, and at once discovers its Causes and Effects, and penetrates not only into the Accidents, but to the very Substance of the thing : nor doth he only behold Corporeal, but also Spiritual things. So that Man, whilst he pilgrimizeth here below, in point of Understanding, is not a little, but so far inferior to Angels, that be he never so ingenious, and never so inquisitive after Knowledge, if he be compared with an Angel, deserves to be no more accounted of, than a Child not yet weaned from the Breast. For the Prophet hath truly sung of us Mortals, *Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou perfected praise.* Hear the Judgment of Solomon, the wisest of Men, concerning that Knowledge of ours, which so puffeth up. *All things are full of trouble or difficulty, Man cannot utter it : And again, No Man can find out the Work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.*

Psal. 8.

Ecclef. 1.

Ecclef. 3.

If all things are full of Difficulty, and cannot be accounted for by Man, and if Man understands nothing of this visible World from the very first thing that was created to the last; understands I say, nothing perfectly, so as to be

be able to unfold the Nature, Properties, Accidents, Powers, and other things which belong to it ; in what Errors will he intangle himself, if he shall attempt to find out the things which are above the Heavens ?

Wherefore, my Soul, if thou art wise, pursue wholesom Knowledge, and seek after the Wisdom of Saints, which consists in fearing God, and keeping his Commandments : Do thou conceive greater delight in Prayer, than in Disputations ; and in Charity that eases, than in Knowledge that puffeth up ; for this is the way which leadeth to Life, and to the Kingdom of Heaven, where we little ones shall be made equal to the Angels, who always behold the Face of our Father which is in Heaven.

C H A P. III.

THere is, besides, a third thing wherein the Human Soul is not a little, but very much, inferior to an Angel. The thing I mean is Power and Dominion over Bodies. For the Soul of Man can move its own Body, by the sole Command of Will, but has no Power to move other Bodies after this manner ; and it moves its own Body by a Progressive Motion upon Earth, but cannot suspend it over the Water, or convey it on high into the Air, and carry it where it has a Mind : but Angels by the mere impulse of Spirit, that is, by the Command of the Will, raise

raise heavy Bodies up on high, and carry them whither they please. Thus one Angel took away *Habbakuk*, and carried him in a little time to *Babylon*, to bring *Daniel* his Dinner, and re-conveyed him to *Palestine*. Besides, Man cannot maintain a Fight with his Enemies, with the Spirit alone, but is forc'd to make use of his Hands, and Instruments of War; but Angels without these, or the like Weapons, engage with an Host of armed Men, and without any other Artillery, but only that of the Spirit, do always come off victorious. Thus one Angel once slew an hundred eighty five thousand *Assyrians*. And if an Angel can do such great things, what can the Creator, and Lord of Angels do? Certainly, he that made all things of nothing, can reduce all things to nothing. The Mind of Man by the Art of painting, and carving, with great Labour of Body, and Application of Mind, can make Images of Men to resemble living and real Men, that seem to breath, and to be alive indeed. Angels without any Pains and Trouble, without the help of Hands, and Instruments, and almost in a Moment's Space, can so fit themselves with a Body from the Elements, that prudent Men themselves shall take it for the Body of a Man, because it speaks, walks, eats, drinks, and may be handled, felt, and also washed. So *Abraham* provided Meat for the Angels, and washed their Feet, because, as the Apostle explains it, he entertained Angels, whilst he thought he only entertained Men. Which also happned to *Lot* when he brought two Angels into his House, whom he took only for Men that were

Gen. 18.

Heb. 13.

Gen. 19.

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also,

were Strangers. So also the Angel *Raphael*, convers'd many days with the younger *Tobit*, walking, speaking, eating, drinking, as if he had been truly and properly a Man: and yet he himself afterwards, when he was about going away, tells him, *I seem'd indeed to eat and drink with you; but I make use of invisible meat, and of drink which cannot be seen of men:* and on a sudden vanished out of their sight. It proceeds, no doubt, from a great Power, to form on a sudden such a Body, as can in no respect be distinguish'd from an human and living Body: and on a sudden at pleasure so to dissolve this Body, that there shall not remain any print or footstep thereof. But if the Power of Angels is so great and wonderful, who have no more Power than what he was pleas'd to furnish them with; how great must the Power of their Creator be? Even as the Knowledge of Angels and ours, compar'd with the Knowledge of God is Ignorance; and as the Righteousness of Angels and Men, compar'd with that of God is Unrighteousness; so the universal Power of Angels and Men, if laid in the balance against that of God, will weigh lighter than Vanity it self. Therefore our God is truly called, the only Wise, only Good, and only Powerful.

CHAP IV.

L Astly, if we consider the place of Angels and Men, we shall find in this respect also, that Man, or the Human Soul, is not a
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little, but much inferiour to an Angel. For God hath assign'd the human Soul its Station on Earth, but the Angels have their place in Heaven, that is, in the Palace of God :

Pfal. 114. For the heavens are the Lords, but the earth hath he given to the sons of men. Hence it is that

Mat. 24. our Lord calls them the Angels of heaven ; and

Lu. 15. in another place saith, There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth ; and a little after, There shall be joy in the presence of the Angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth. Besides, God hath so ty'd the Soul to the Body, that it must of necessity attend it in all its motions. But God hath not encumber'd the Angels with Bodies, and hath empower'd them to pass with all imaginable speed, from Heaven to Earth, and from Earth to Heaven, or wherever they please. So an Angel who comes the nearest to God in Dignity of Nature, doth in some measure also by his subtilty resemble his Omnipresence : For God is at all times in all places, by the Immensity of his Nature, and since he is in all places, he has no need of changing place. An Angel by the swiftness of his motion, doth pass with so much ease from place to place, and present himself in all places, that after a manner he may seem to be every where.

But, my Soul, if thou wilt hearken to the God of Angels, thou shalt have no cause either to envy them their height of place, or that no Fatigue attends their wonderful swiftness of motion : For not only thou, my Soul, when loosed from the Body, shalt be equal to the Angels, but when re-united to the Body which Christ shall make like his own glorious Bo-

dy, thou and thy Body shall possess Heaven as thine own home; and the Body it self being spiritualiz'd, shall instantly be without Labour or Fatigue in any place where thou its Soul shalt will and require it to be. The Lord doth not go about to impose upon thee, when he saith in his Gospel, *In my Fathers house are many mansions: and, I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and take you unto my self, that where I am, there ye may be also: and, Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.* But thou art not to learn where Christ is, and what a Body he hath; for thou every day confessest and sayest, *The third day he arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven.* Thou knowest also, that his Body after the Resurrection us'd to enter into the room, where the Disciples were assembled, when the Doors were shut; and that when he departed thence, he did it not by walking, but vanishing away; that is, he convey'd his Body from one place to another so very nimbly, as if it had been a Spirit, not a Body. But if thou aimest at such a glorious State, thou must conform thy Body, whilst below, to the body of Christ's Humility, and then Christ will fashion thy Body like to his own Glorious Body. Next thou must tread in those steps he did, *For Christ suffer'd for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps,* as St. Petter tells us, *1 Peter 2.* And what are these Steps? *Who did,* saith he, *no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered*

suffered he threatned not. There are two foot-steps of Christ, from which if thou strayest, thou art out of thy way, and wilt never come to thy Country. Thou must abstain from doing evil, and patiently bear it when offer'd; and, which follows from hence, thou must do good, and expect no suitable return in this World: and which is the sum of all, thou must love thy Neighbour for God's sake, with a true and sincere love of Amiry, not with the love of Concupiscence; thou must love him freely, without any expectation from Man, being content with a retribution from God, which exceedeth all that thou canst conceive.

C H A P. V.

COME we now to the Dignity of Angels, according to Grace. In this respect indeed Man is more than a little inferiour to Angels. For at the beginning God so created the several Angels, as at once to found their Nature, and infuse Grace in them, as St. *Augustin* shews us in his Books of the City of God. And then by their close adhering to God, from the first turning of their Mind towards him, when the rest fell, they were presently crown'd with Blifs and Glory. Therefore their State of Pilgrimage was very short, and their Abode in Heaven Eternal; if that little Interval of time between their Creation and Beatitude, may be termed a Pilgrimage. We Men indeed received Grace with Nature at our Creation, but it was in our first Parent,

not

not in our selves ; and therefore when he fell, we all fell with him, according to that of the Apostle, *All have sinned*. But though we are reconciled to God by the Mediator of God and Men, Christ Jesus ; yet are we sentenc'd to a tedious Banishment, and whilst we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, and not by sight ; and one thing that mightily afflicts pious Men, and such as long for their Country, is, that we live in the mean time amidst very fierce and cruel Enemies, and are in danger, thro' their slight and cunning, of being excluded from our most pleasant and delightful Country : from hence come such Expressions as these, *Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged ; that I dwell in the Tents of Kedar ; my soul hath been a very great stranger*.

C H A P. VI.

IT remains now that we speak something of the Offices of Angels, which are in number five. The first is, to sing Praises and Hymns incessantly to the Creator. And that we may understand how much God values this service, we must consider, that Angels of the highest order are appointed to this Office, after whom as Precentors, all the Quires of Angels do tune their Voices, with incredible Jubilation. Hear the Prophet *Isaiab*, *I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the Seraphim, each one had six wings ; with two where-*

of they cover'd his feet, and with two they did fly, And one cryed to another, and said, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.* Here you read of Seraphim, which are Princes of the highest Order; you see that they put a Veil over his Face and Feet, which is a sign of Reverence; as if they durst not behold his Face, or touch his bare Feet: you see, that the same fly as they sing, which signifies Affection, and Desire of advancing still nearer and nearer to God. Which two things are necessary for those who desire to please God while they sing his Praises, that is, that they join Love with Reverence, and Reverence with Love, which the Prophet David expressly requires, saying, *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before him with trembling.*

Psal. 2

From hence, my Soul, may'st thou learn, how great Reverence is due to God, when as the Prime Nobility of Heaven, who continually stand before him, and always behold his Face, and yet neither from the Eminency of their station, nor their long acquaintance, dare at any time lay aside Fear and Reverence, whilst they set forth his praise: and what wilt thou say for thy self, who art but Dust and Ashes, when thou shalt be accused of Drowsiness, and wandering Thoughts, at that time, when thou art to bear a part in so Divine a Work, to which thou wast not worthy to be admitted? Learn at least for the future, from so great an Example, to offer up Hymns and Praises to God, with Fear and Trembling, with Attention and Watchfulness, with Love and longing Desires.

Steps of Ascension to God.

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Another Office of Angels is to offer the Prayers of poor Mortals, and to recommend them to God : for thus saith the Angel *Raphael* in the Book of *Tobit*, *When thou prayedst with tears, Tob. 12 and didst bury the dead, and didst leave thy dinner, I offer'd thy prayer to the Lord.* And in the Revelations *John* saw an Angel standing before the Altar, having a golden Censer, and *Rev. 8. there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.* Here is to be seen the wonderful Clemency and Mercifulness of our God : for, not thinking it sufficient, first by his Prophets, then by his Son, and Apostles, to encourage us to pray, and make our requests ; he adds withal a Promise, that he will give us whatsoever we petition for : *Ask, saith he, and it shall be Luke 11. given ; and, if ye shall ask the Father any thing in John 16. my name, he will give it you.* And as if he had not been yet liberal enough in his Promises, he gives us farther encouragement, by offering a reward ; *But thou, saith he, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut to the door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee ; that is, shall give thee something more than what thou hast petition'd for : for thus saith the Lord in the same place, concerning Alms and Fasting, Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee.* But as if all these Arguments of a fatherly affection were not sufficient, God hath appointed Angels, as his most constant Attendants to take care of Prayers, as of Memorials for the poor, which they offer, and read in his presence, that no Petition of poor

Supplicants might be forgotten. What earthly Prince ever promised a Reward to such as came to petition for Favour or Justice? And yet they who apply to the Princes of this World, are Men, as Princes themselves are Men, form'd of the same clay, and subjects also of the same God, who is King of Kings. But if it be too much for Princes to give a reward to such as come with petitions, yet methinks it shou'd seem but fair and equitable, to give them free admittance, and to depute some faithful Officer, that may carefully preserve the Petitions of their subjects, and solicit for quick Dispatch.

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Heb. 1.

The third Office of Angels consists in this, that they are sent as Ambassadors to signify God's Will and Pleasure, especially about the affairs of Redemption, and eternal Salvation. For thus saith the Apostle to the *Hebrews*, *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?* Thus we find in many places of the Old Testament, that Angels appear'd to the Patriarchs and Prophets, and revealed to them what God would make known to the World. Thus also we read in the New Testament, that the Arch-Angel *Gabriel* was sent a Messenger to *Zacharias*, and to the blessed Virgin; and also that Angels were sent to Shepherds, to *Joseph*, and after the Resurrection of our Lord, to those Women that were at the place of his Interment: and after the Ascension, to all the Disciples. Now the reason that God, who is in all places, and can without assistance, signify his pleasure in the hearts of Men, and yet will make use of the ministry of Angels, seems to

to be, that Men may the better be convinc'd, that God superintends human affairs, and that all things are govern'd, and directed by him. For Men might easily perswade themselves, that Divine Inspirations are their own Deductions from Reason, or their own Counsels; but when they see or hear that Angels are sent, and their Predictions exactly fulfill'd, they can make no doubt, but that God has regard to human affairs; and that he doth more especially dispose and order those things which appertain to the eternal well-being of his elect.

A fourth Office of Angels is the Protection of Men, both in particular, and in general. For God our Father hath been graciously pleas'd to recommend the Infirmities of poor Mortals to the support of his most powerful Servants; and to set them over them, either as Schoolmasters over Children, or as Trustees to Minors, or Patrons to Clients, or as Shepherds to Sheep, or Physicians to the Sick, or as Guardians to Orphans, or Protectors to such as cannot defend themselves, without being shelter'd under the wings of the more potent and great. That Angels guard and protect Men in particular, *David* witnesseth, *He shall give his Angels charge over thee, that they keep thee in all thy ways.* Another Witness, and that a most Authentick one, is Christ himself, *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that their Angels in heaven do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* And of their being Protectors of Provinces, and Kingdoms, *Daniel* bears witness, who calls the Angel that pro-

Psal. 91.

Mat. 18.

Dan. 10.

protected the Kingdom of the *Persians*, the Prince of *Persia* : and the Protector of the Kingdom of *Greece*, he calls the Prince of the *Grecians* : and the Protector of the Children of *Israel*, he calls by his proper name *Michael*. And lastly, *St. John* tells us of the Protectors of Churches, when he makes mention of the Angel of the Church of *Ephesus*, and of the Angel of the Church of *Smirna*, and of others.

Seest thou not, my Soul, how concern'd the great Majesty of Heaven and earth is for us his poor Servants, tho' he stands in no need of any thing we have or can do ? What can he do, which he has not already done, to express his wonderful love ? He hath laden us with Kindness, to invite us to stay with him : He hath fenc'd us with Guards, that we should not run away : He hath surronded us with Defence, that we might not be forc'd from him : what could he more, were we his peculiar Treasure, as he indeed is our great and only Treasure ? Therefore, my Soul, at last submit to Love ; and being overcome by the kindness of so great a Lover, wholly surrender, and irrevocably make over thy self ; be not moved at any thing that is seen ; let thy Thoughts dwell upon things invisible, and let thy Heart pant after them. *For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

5th The last Office of Angels is, that they arm themselves like common Soldiers, or Commanders, to work revenge upon Nations, and to rebuke a sinful People. They are Angels who destroy'd Infamous Cities with Fire and

and Brimstone ; that 'slew the first-born all over *Egypt* ; who overthrew many thousand *Assyrians* at one assault : they are Angels who at the last day shall separate the Wicked from amongst the Just, and shall throw them into a furnace of fire.

Therefore let pious Men love holy Angels, their Fellow-citizens : let the Wicked stand in dread of the Power of Angels, who execute the Wrath of an Omnipotent God, out of whose Hands there is no escaping.

THE

THE

Tenth Step.

*From Consideration of the Essence of God,
by Similitude of corporeal Greatness.*

C H A P. I.

WE have ascended as high as we can by created Substances, nor are we yet arriv'd at that knowledge of God, which, even in this valley of Tears we may attain to, by Contemplation. It remains then, that we consider whether by those Dimensions of corporeal Quantity, which we are acquainted with, we can ascend to the breadth and length, the height and depth of the invisible Essence of God. For of things created, those are said to be Great, which have the four great Dimensions. But in the *Psalms*, and elsewhere, 'tis often said that God is Great, and that of *his Greatness there is no End*. Sure I am St. Bernard, who was eminent for Speculation, made great Advances in the knowledge of God, by his considerations of these Dimensions. Nor was he the first that contriv'd such Instruments of Ascension,

cension, but learn'd the way from the Apostle, who enter'd into the third Heaven and Paradise. For thus saith the Apostle to the Ephesians, *That ye may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth.* For he that shall attentively consider, will certainly find that there is no fulness, nor any thing stable, or solid, out of God ; but that all things have strait, and narrow bounds, are mean, empty, and superficial : but will find God's Immensity to be true Breadth ; his Eternity true Length ; the Sublimity of his Nature true Height ; and his Incomprehensibility true Profoundness, Depth indeed without bottom : Again, he will find his Omnipotency to be true Height ; his Infinite Wisdom true Depth ; his Bowels full of Compassion, true Breadth ; his Strictness and Impartiality of Judgment, *i. e.* his compleat and perfect Justice, true Length.

Eph. 3.

But it is not enough to consider these things Superficially, if we have a mind to Ascend on High, and find out what we seek for ; no, we must think on them, till we have a full knowledge of them. For this is what the Apostle saith, *that ye may comprehend with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth.* Now that Person has this Comprehension, who after the most serious, and attentive Consideration, is fully perswaded that the thing is so, and is so fully perswaded thereof, that he sells all that he hath, and makes hast to purchase the Treasure he hath found. For therefore the Apostle added, *with all Saints,* for none but Saints do clearly comprehend these things ; or, no one hath

a right comprehension of them, but he must be made holy. Nor doth St. *Aug.* contradict what we have said, in his Epistle to *Honoratus*, affirming, that the Apostle describes the Cross of Christ, by breadth, length, height, and depth. For, (as he there tells us) the transverse Wood (or piece a cross) to which his Hands were fastened, when he was crucified, appertaineth to breadth; the long piece on which his crucified Body hung, to length; that part appearing above the Cross, whereon was the Inscription, to Height; that which was fixed in the Ground, and was out of sight, to Depth. By this I say, St. *Aug.* doth not contradict my Meaning, but rather admirably help to explain it: For the Cross of Christ is the way to obtain true breadth, length, height, and depth. For though the Cross of Christ appear to Humane Eyes, to have neither breadth, length, height, nor depth; yet it really reacheth from East to West, and from North to South, it hath spread its Glory far and wide, by the preaching of the Apostles: And its top reacheth to the highest Heaven, which it hath open'd, like a Key, to the Elect; and hath likewise penetrated to the bottom of Hell, which against God's Chosen, it hath eternally shut.

C H A P. II.

LET us begin with his Essence, and then we will pass to his Attributes. The Essence of God, on several accounts may, with good

good reason, be termed very broad. First, it is exceedingly broad in it self, and incapable of being measur'd, as comprehending all the perfections of things created, and of things that may be created, and still infinitely more perfections. For what thing soever is, shall or may be made, is certainly contain'd in God, in a more eminent manner, and measure. Therefore other things are good with something added, as, a good Man, a good Horse, a good House, a good Garment, and so of all other things. But God is all manner of good; for when *Moses* said, *Shew me thy Glory*, God answer'd, I will shew thee all Good. Had a Man some one Thing by him, comprising all the objects of the Senses, in the highest degree of perfection, so that he should have no Temptation to step out of his House, either for the sake of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching, having at home as great Delights in that One Thing, as the most Voluptuous Person can desire, would not such a thing be of great worth and value? But if besides, that One Thing contain'd in it, as great plenty of all manner of Riches, as the most covetous person could wish for, so that he should have no desire to go out of his House for larger Acquisitions, would not this yet farther recommend the Thing? Again, if This Thing could furnish those who have it, with as much Honour and Dignity as the most Ambitious can aspire to, would not the worth of such a Thing seem altogether invaluable? And if the same Thing could satisfy, not only the desire of Man, but also of an Angel, which is as much

much greater, and more capacious than Man's, as the knowledge of Angels is greater than Man's, what would'st thou say of it? And yet the goodness of such a Thing, would come far short of the goodness of God, which is so great, as to satisfy, and fill the infinite desire, or rather the infinite capacity of God. O admirable Breadth of Perfection in the Divine Essence, containing such Immensity of good Things, as can fully satisfy the infinite capacity which is in God! For God never goes out of himself, because he hath all good things in himself: And before the foundation of the World, was as rich, and happy as after, because God made nothing, but what was in himself before, in a more excellent manner.

Understandest thou, my Soul, what a Good thou shall enjoy in thy Country, if thou lovest God by the way, and what a Good thou shall be depriv'd of, if thou misapplyest thy Love? For God will give Himself, that is, All manner of Good, to be enjoy'd by those who love him, when he shall say to the good and faithful Servant, *Enter into the joy of thy Lord.*

C H A P. III.

BUT the Immensity of God appears in another respect, as filling every place in the whole Creation. *I fill Heaven and Earth, saith the Lord.* And were there more Worlds, he would fill them all. *If, saith David, I shall*

Jer. 23.

Omnipresence

Steps of Ascension to God.

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shall ascend up to Heaven, thou art there, If I go Psal. 139.
down into Hell, thou art there also. To which I

add, if I go above the Heavens, beneath, or out of them, I shall not be alone, because Thou wilt be there : for neither, indeed, can I be at all, except I am in thee, and thou support me, who dost support all things with the Word of thy Power. Neither doth God only fill all Bodies with his immense Greatness, but also all Spirits, Hearts, and Minds. For how could he make a Scrutiny and Search into Hearts, if he were not in Hearts ? And how could he hear the Petitions of Hearts, if he had not an Ear at our Hearts ? And how could the Prophet say, *I will hear what God the Lord will speak in me*, if God did not apply his Mouth to the Ears of our Heart ? Happy is that Soul which is in love with God, because her beloved is ever present ; because she always carries him in her Bosom, and is always cherished in the Bosom of her beloved : *For he that abideth in love, abideth in God, and* 1 John 4.
God in him.

Nor doth God only replenish all things with his Presence, but with his Glory also. For this is the Cry of the Seraphim, *The whole* Isai. 6.
Earth is full of his Glory. And David saith further, *O Lord our God, how wonderful is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy Glory above the Heavens !* As if he had said, not only thy Name, Renown, and Glory, have filled the whole Earth with Admiration, but have ascended up to Heaven, yea, are advanced above the Heavens. And, to say no more, Ecclesiasticus addeth, *The Works of God are full* Eccclus. 3.
of his Glory : For there is not a Creature in

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Heaven or Earth, but which continually praiseth God. And this is the Reason that *David* in his Psalms, and the Three Children in *Daniel*, exhort all Creatures to bless and praise the Creator. For they knew very well that a great many Creatures were incapable of hearing Exhortations; but because they knew that all the Works of God were good, and by being so, did in their kind praise the Creator; they did therefore congratulate, and encourage them still to proceed as they had begun.

And surely he who wants not the Eyes of his Understanding, may see that all the Works of the Lord are as it were Censers, sending up a sweet Odour to the Glory of God: and he that has understanding Ears, may hear, as it were, a various Harmony of all sorts of Musical Instruments, praising God, and saying, *It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves*, For tho' wicked and ungodly Men do every where abound, that curse God, and blaspheme his Name, yet even these, tho' against their Will, are forc'd to praise God after the manner that the Work commends the Workman. For in them the Power of God, by which they are made, is very conspicuous, and so is the Wisdom of God, by which he governs them; and his Goodness, which continues their Being, tho' they are ungrateful and wicked; and his Mercy and Righteousness, by which he doth either justly sentence them to Punishment, or mercifully wait for their Repentance, and Amendment.

There are Multitudes here below, that are deaf to these Voices of the Creatures, yet they

they cease nor to cry : not are there wanting innumerable Angels, and holy Men, who carefully listen to these Praises : that are delighted therewith, and continually employ'd themselves in celebrating the Divine Creator with Hymns, and with Songs of Praise.

C H A P. IV.

NOW the length of Divine Essence is God's Eternity, whose Duration neither had beginning, nor shall have end, and shall continue the same without the least Change or Alteration : *Thou art the same*, saith the Psalmist, *and thy years shall not fail*. And St. Paul calls God the King of Ages, because he alone is not subject to Ages, but presides over them, directs, and governs them, for He and only He preceded all Ages. Other things either have Beginning and End, and never continue in the same State, or have a Beginning without End, and without change of Substance, but might, were it the Creator's Pleasure, also cease to be. Therefore Eternity is so proper to God only, that it can agree to no Creature ; nor has any Prince ever yet arrived at such an height of Arrogancy, as to assume, amongst the many Titles have been usurped, that of Eternity ; or if any did, it was in another Sense, as *Constantine* was stil'd Eternal Emperor, because he had not the Government for a certain time, but for Life.

But thou, my Soul, mayest be reckoned amongst both these kinds of Creatures. For thou hast a Body which began to be when it

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was conceived, and was born; and which gradually increas'd to that size, and measure, which God had before appointed; and then began to decrease, and in a short time Death will put an end to its Being, and so never continues in one State, being at all times, and in every part, subject to change. The Prophet hath pronounced Sentence of thy Body, by the Similitude of Hay. *In the morning they are like grass which groweth up; in the morning it flourisheth and groweth up, in the evening it is cut down and withereth.* For in the Morning, that is, in Childhood, the Body of Man is green like Grass, but quickly passeth from thence to Youth: in the Meridian of Youth it flourisheth, and presently makes a Transition to old Age: in the Evening of old Age, it falls down, grows stiff by Death, withers in the Grave, and returns to its primitive Dust. Behold, therefore, my Soul, at what a distance thy Body is from Eternity! As to thy self, thou wast created in time, whereas before thou wast nothing; and in this respect there is a vast disparity betwixt thee, and thy Creator; but now thou art created, thy Duration will be Eternal, and this thou hast in common with thy Creator. But since thou art subject to change, whilst in the Body, from Vice to Virtue, and from Virtue to Vice, and since in whatsoever Condition thou shalt be found after thy departure from the Body, in the same thou shalt be adjudg'd, either to reign eternally with God, or to suffer everlasting Torments with the Devil; therefore thy principal Care ought to be, to shun Vice, and always to tread in the Paths of Virtue. Beware there-

therefore of being seduced by the Allurements of the Flesh, to the eternal Detriment both of that and thy self; but crucifie the Flesh, with the vicious Inclinations thereof, that after a few Days are over, not only thou thy self mayest lead a Life of Eternal Happiness, but that also thy Flesh may have a glorious Resurrection, and jointly with thy self remain everlastingly united with the Divine Essence. But tho' the Souls of the blessed, and the holy Angels also, shall participate of God's Eternity, in that most sublime and happy Union with God, by Vittue of the Beatifick Vision, and Love, which Union shall not only be endless, but also firm and unshaken; yet in many other Respects, they shall be capable of varying and changing Thoughts, Affections, and Place. Therefore they shall always admire, and look up with Wonder at, the Divine Eternity above them, in which there can be no Change of Mind, Will, or Place, and yet nothing shall be wanting to it, but it shall perpetually be possess'd of all things, which by Eternal Changes it might have furnish'd it self with. Wherefore length of Eternity is an Infinite thing, and equally proper to God, as the breadth of Immensity.

C H A P. V.

THE next thing in order to be consider'd is, the Height of Divine Essence, with respect to which *David* thus addresses God, *Thou only art most high.* Now God alone

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is

is most high in Nobility of Nature : for things are so much the more noble, and eminent, by how much the more pure, and more abstracted from Matter. This we see first in corporeal things : for Water is superior to Earth in Nature, because purer ; and on the same Account, Air is superior to Water ; Fire to Air, and Heaven to Fire. We see the same thing, secondly, in spiritual things. For the Understanding is superior to Sense, because Sense hath a bodily Organ, which the Understanding needeth not : and the Understanding of an Angel is superior to that of Man, because Man needs the ministry of Imagination and Fancy, which an Angel doth not : and amongst Angels, those are of a superior Rank, who understand most things by the fewest Species. And therefore God, who only is a pure Act, and stands in need of nothing without himself, neither Organ, Imagination, nor Species ; no, not the Presence of any Object without himself, but his Essence it self is all things to him, and nothing can happen to him, which he always actually had not, and to have actually, is always to be a simple and pure Act ; on these Accounts I say, the Divine Nature is most High and Sublime, and God can by no means have an equal. Therefore he that said, *I will be like the most High*, was presently tumbled from Heaven to the depth of Hell, as *Esaiah* describes it. And Christ our Lord saith of the same, *I saw Satan like lightning fall from Heaven*.

God is also most High on another Account, as he is the prime supream Cause of all things, the Efficient, Exemplary, and Final Cause.

Isai. 14.

God

Cause. He is the highest Efficient Cause, because there is nothing created with a Faculty to act in any Respect, which had not that Faculty from God, but God derives his Power from none. Further, there is no Cause which can exercise its Powers, except it be mov'd by God; but God is mov'd of none. Lastly, amongst created things, those are term'd superior Causes which are Universal, on which particular depend, as the Heavens, and Angels, which move the Heavens; but God created both the Heavens and Angels: He then only is the first, and highest Efficient Cause. He is likewise the prime Exemplary Cause, because God made all things after the Forms and Ideas which are in himself. Lastly, he is the prime final Cause, because he created all things, as the Wise Man saith, for Himself, that is, to manifest his Glory. But God is very properly called, as he is, *The most High*, because he sitteth upon the highest Throne. *I saw*, saith *Esaïas*, *the Lord sitting upon an high and lofty Throne*. And because a Seat hath a two-fold Use, one to give Judgment from, another to take Rest on, we will severally consider these Uses.

CHAP. VI.

AND first, God hath the highest Seat, because he is the supream Judge. For *Abraham* calls God *the Judge of all the Earth*; *Gen. 18.* and *David* saith, *that he is a Judge of the Gods*: that is, God judgeth Judges themselves, who

Psal. 82.

in the Scriptures are called Gods. But St. James very plainly affirms, *There is but one Lawgiver, and Judge*: that is, God alone is properly Lawgiver, and Judge, because he gives Laws to all, and receives from none, he judges all, and is judged of none. Besides, God is not only a Judge, but he is also a King, and so acts not as a Judge commission'd by the King, but as a supream King, and Prince; from whence he is call'd *King of Kings*, and a great King above all Gods; and terrible amongst the Kings of the Earth; the reason is, because he transfers Kingdoms, and Empires at his Pleasure, from one Nation to another, and when he pleases, taketh away the Breath of Kings. But lastly, God is not only a Supream Judge and King, but also an Absolute Lord, which is the highest Title of all. For Kings are not such absolute Lords over Subjects, as that they can at Pleasure deprive them of Estate or Life. Of this, King *Abab* is an Evidence, who had a Mind to *Naboth's Vineyard*, but could not come at the Possession of it, but by the Calumny and Fraud of his Wife, which occasion'd a most deplorable Death to them both. But God is truly and properly a Lord, all things serve him, and he is Servant to none, who can, when he pleases, reduce all things to nothing, as at first he made all things of nothing.

Rev.

Pl. 95. 76

Consider then, my Soul, in what Fear and Dread we poor Worms of the Earth should be, when we think on Him, who sits upon a Throne exalted to such an height, that He has nothing at all above Him. If I am your Lord or Master, saith he by *Malachy*, where is

my fear? And if the Supream Princes in the Heavenly Court, stand before Him with fear and trembling, what Behaviour will become us, who are mortal and frail Creatures, and co-habit in this Vale of Misery with Beasts that perish? But this seems strange that the most High God should not delight in Creatures that are like Himself, that is, such as are high and lofty, but in those that are humble and mean; for thus saith God by *Esaïas*, *To this Man will* *Isai. 66.*

I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite Spirit, and trembleth at my Word. And *David* tells us, that *although God is high, yet hath he respect unto things that are low.* And yet, 'tis true, God is pleas'd with things that are high and lofty, and in this respect like Himself; but they are things that are really so, not such as seem to be, and are not. Therefore God loveth not the Proud, who ought not to be termed high and lofty, but Men haughty and puffed up. But he loves the humble, and such as tremble at his Word, because the lower they debase themselves, the higher they are exalted by God himself. And they who are exalted by God, are high indeed. Therefore the very same Persons are both humble, and lofty; humble in their own Eyes, lofty in the Sight of God. Could any one have seen, not only with the Eyes of his Body, but those of the Heart too, and the same Divinely illuminated, the rich Glutton dress'd up in fine Linnen, and Purple, and sitting at a Table furnish'd with all sorts of Delicacies, attended with many Servants, carefully executing their several Offices; and could at the same time have seen poor humble *Lazarus* sitting at the rich Man's Gate, half

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Luke 16.

naked, and full of Sores, and begging to be fed with those Crumbs which fell from the rich Man's Table ; he, I say, that could have seen this, had seen a rich Man, whom the World accounted exceedingly happy, most abominable and vile in the Sight of God, and his Angels , and no better than the filth and offscouring of the Earth. *For that which is highly esteem'd with Men, is Abomination to the Lord,* as our Lord tells us at the same time that he gives a Description of the Glutton. On the contrary, he would have seen poor and mean *Lazarus* ennobled and honour'd, as a Pearl of great Price, in the Sight of God and his Angels ; as the Issue plainly shewed. For *Lazarus*, as a Favourite of God, is conveyed by the Hands of Angels into *Abraham's Bosom*; infernal Spirits draggaway the rich Man, who was odious to God, and throw him into that Fire which never will be quenched. But why do I instance in *Lazarus* ? No one was ever in more Esteem with God, than our Lord Jesus Christ, even with respect to his Humanity, and yet none is found more humble than he, either in Heaven or Earth, as he very truly affirmed of himself. *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.* For by how much the more clearly that most holy Soul understood the infinite height of Divinity, than all others, so much the more clearly understood he the vileness of the Creature, which is made of nothing ; and therefore being also a Creature, makes greater Submission to God than others, humbles himself, and exalts God, and is likewise exalted by God above all Creatures, even Angels themselves. And the same may

Matt. 11.

be affirmed of Angels and Holy Men ; for none are more humble than they who have the highest Seats in Heaven, because the nearer they are admitted to God, the more clearly they perceive what a vast difference there is betwixt the Greatness of the Creator, and the Littleness of the Creature.

Wherefore, my Soul, love thou Humility, if thou desirest true Preferment. Be a follower of the Lamb without blemish, imitate the Virgin *Mary*, Cherubim and Seraphim, who all, the higher they are, the more humble they appear.

C H A P. VII.

NOR has God only the highest Seat, with respect to Universal Judicature, but also because he enjoys greater Rest than others, and brings Rest and Quietude to all with whom he takes up his Residence. The highest Seat of God is the exalted height of his Rest ; for though he governs the Universe, wherein are continual Wars, and Conflicts of Elements, and of Beasts, and Men ; yet he undisturbedly passeth Judgment, as we read in the Book of *Wisdom*, and always enjoys a profound Peace ; nor can any accident interrupt his Quiet, or his Contemplation of Himself, wherein consists his everlasting Delight. In this respect also he is called the King of *Jerusalem*, which is the Vision of Peace. But his proper Seat is with the blessed Spirits, and thence he is said to sit upon the Cherubim. But God is rather said to sit upon

on the Cherubim than Seraphim, because *Cherubim* signifies *Abundance of Knowledge*, but *Seraphim* the *Ardour of Charity*: Now Rest is a consequent of Understanding, but Care and Anxiety attend Charity, unless it be temper'd with Discretion. Therefore also the Soul of the Righteous is called the Seat of Wisdom.

66. Lastly, when *Esaïas* saith, *Heaven is my Throne*; and when *David* affirms, *The Heaven of Heavens are the Lords*; by the Heaven of Heavens are meant the Spiritual Heavens, whose dwelling is above the Corporeal Heavens, that is, the blessed Spirits, as *St. Augustin* declares in his Exposition of the hundred and fourteenth Psalm. But to these Heavens God gives so wonderful a rest, that the Peace they enjoy is what passeth Understanding. *St. Bernard* uses a very apt similitude in his Sermons on the *Canticles* to explain this Rest: *God who is Dispassionate and Quiet, makes all things so; and to behold him in his Quietude, is to have Rest our selves. Thus have we observ'd some earthly Potentate, after the trouble of debating Causes, answering of Petitions, and giving Audience, dismissing the Crowd, and shuning vexatious Cares, to retire to his Apartment, and go into his Bed-Chamber with a few, whom he vouchsafeth the honour of this Privacy and Familiarity; resting so much the more securely, by how much the more privately; enjoying the greater Quiet, the more pleas'd he is to have none in his Presence but Favourites, and those whom he loves.* By which Account *St. Bernard* shews, that God doth not carry himself as a Judge to the Spirits of the Blessed, but like a Friend and Familiar. And indeed, the Intimacy is not to be express'd, which

which is in this Life betwixt God and pure Minds ; infomuch that this Saying, *My delight is with the Sons of Men* ; and that other, *My Secret is with the Righteous*, seem to be fully accomplished.

From hence surely it is, that all Saints, though they suffer'd Affliction in the World, yet had Peace in their Heart, because God was there, and therefore always look'd pleasant and serene, and were so indeed, for he that cannot lie had said unto them, *Your Heart shall rejoice, and your Joy no Man shall take from you.* John 16.

C H A P VIII.

THE fourth part of Greatness is yet behind, which is call'd Depth. Now there appears a manifold depth in the Essence of God. First, the Divinity it self in him is most profound, because it is not superficial and thin, but very full and solid. The Deity is not like a Mass that is gilded over, and has nothing of Gold but what appears on the surface and outside, and within is only Copper or Wood ; but like a Mass that is all over Gold, a huge and vast Mass ; or rather like a Mine of Gold, so very deep that it can never be exhausted : Thus God is altogether Incomprehensible, because as a Mine of Gold, in which can be discovered no bottom, is never exhausted by digging ; so likewise God, of whose Greatness there is no end, is never perfectly known by a created Mind, but that

that farther Discoveries may still be made ; and that infinite depth can only be fathom'd by God, because he alone is infinite in Understanding. But secondly, God is profound, with respect to place ; for as he is most high, because he has the Presidency over all things, and is above all things ; so likewise God is the most profound, because he is put under all things, that he may be a Foundation for them ; and is beneath all things, that he may support all : For as the Apostle saith, *He beareth all things with the word of his Power.* Therefore God is, as it were, both the Foundation and Roof of the Building, *in whom we all live and move and have our being.* Solomon therefore said very truly, *The Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain thee ;* because God more properly contains the Heavens, and the things which are under Heaven, as being both above the Heavens and below the Earth. Lastly, God's Invisibleness is his Depth ; for God is light, but inaccessible ; he is truth, but very retir'd ; more reserv'd than what is mostly so. *He hath made darkness his hiding place,* saith David ; and *He is a God,* saith Esaias, *that hideth himself.* St. Augustin once making enquiry after God, sent out his Eyes, as Messengers from Earth to Heaven, and all things answered, *We are not what thou seekest, for he made us.* Therefore not finding God in his survey of outward things, he began to travel through things inward, and found out a truth, that this way we more easily approach to God ; for he knew that the Soul is more excellent than the Body ; and the internal Sense better than the external ; and the Under-

standing,

2 Chro. 6.

Psal. 17.

Isai 45.

standing, which is yet more inward, better than the internal Sense. From hence he concluded, that God, who is more inward than the Understanding, is more excellent than the Understanding; and therefore that whatever we understand, or conceive, is not God, but something inferiour to God, who is more excellent than any thing we can conceive or understand.

Well then, my Soul, if thou art better than thy Body, to which thou impartest Life, because that is a Body, thou a Spirit; and the Eye of thy Body doth not see thee, because that is without, but thou art within; be thou assured, that thy God is better than thou art, because he gives thee Understanding, and is, as it were, the Soul of every Soul; and therefore thou canst not see him, because he is a Spirit, higher and more inward than thou; and thou, as I may say, hast thy abode without, he his within in his most secret and profound Recess. But shalt thou never be admitted to that Secret? God forbid: For our Lord that cannot lie, hath said, *Blessed are the pure in Heart, for they shall see God.* Matt. 5. Nor doth the Apostle deceive us when he saith, *We see now as in a Glass darkly, but then face to face:* Nor St. John the Evangelist, who saith, *We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* And what will that Joy be, when being admitted to this Intimacy, thou shalt see and possess Light it self, Glory it self, Beauty it self, Goodness it self? At that time it will plainly appear, how empty, transitory, and inconsiderable the temporary Goods of this World are,

are, with which being intoxicated, Men forget the true and everlasting Goods. But if thou heartily thirstest after the living God, and if thy Tears are thy Meat Day and Night, whilst it is said, where is thy God? delay not to purifie the Heart, with which God is to be seen; nor be weary of ascending in Heart, till the God of Gods appear in *Sion*; nor be backward to love God and thy Neighbour; nor be content to love in Word and Tongue, but love in Deed and in Truth, for this is the way which leadeth to Life.

THE

T H E

Eleventh Step.

*From the Consideration of the Greatness of
God's Power, by Similitude of corporeal
Greatness.*

C H A P. I.

GREAT is the Lord, and of his Greatness there is no Measure nor Bounds. Nor is he only Great because Omnipotency is his Height; unsearchable Wisdom his Depth; Mercy, universally diffus'd, his Breadth; Justice, like a Rod of Iron, his Length; but because each of these Attributes have the magnitude of infinite Breadth, Length, Height, and Depth.

And to begin with Power, or rather Omnipotency; the Power of God hath its breadth which consists in extending to an infinity of Things: For, in the first place, it reacheth to all things that are made; because there is nothing in the whole Universe, from the most glorious Angel, to the meanest Worm; and from the highest Heaven, to the depth of Hell, which was not made by the

N Power

- Power of God. *All things, saith St. John, were made by him, and without him is not any thing made; and, the World was made by him. It also extends it self to all things which shall be in succeeding Ages, to Eternity: For, as nothing could have been made but by him, so can nothing hereafter be made without him; for thus saith the Apostle, Of him, and through him, and to him are all things. It extends it self to all things which can be, tho' they never should be; for thus saith the Angel, Nothing shall be impossible with God. And our Lord himself saith, With God all things are possible. It extends it self to the utter destruction of things that are made; for as it was in God's Power, by a deluge of Waters, to destroy all Men and Cattle which were in the Earth, excepting a few which he would have to be preserved with Noah in the Ark; so can he by a deluge of Fire, destroy at once not only all Men, and all Cattel which shall be found alive at the last Day; but also all Trees, and all Cities, and all things else in the Earth: The day of the Lord will come, saith St. Peter, as a Thief, in which the Heavens shall pass away with great noise, the Elements shall melt with fervent heat, the Earth, and the Works that are therein shall be burnt up. Great surely is this latitude of Divine Power, which no Man can sufficiently admire, unless he hath sum'd up the multitude of things which God hath made, can, and will make. But who can count so vast a Multitude, save he whose Knowledge is Infinite, and without Limitation? But the magnitude of this Power is much enhans'd, if we consider how great a thing*
- Rom. 11.
- Luke 1.
- 2 Pet. 3.

it is to dissolve things made by so powerful an hand, and of so many Ages continuance, in the Space of one poor Moment, and without the least Difficulty, or, as *Judas Mac-* ^{2 Mac. 8.} *cabens* speaks, to reduce them to nothing with a Beck. *Who, O Lord, amongst the mighty, is like unto thee?*

CHAP. II.

NOW the Length of Divine Power appears in this, that whereas God continually co-operates with all things which he hath made, and neither is, nor will ever be fatigu'd with his Co-operation : because the Power of God can no ways be diminished, weakned, or broken, as being conjoin'd with real Eternity, or rather when it self is the very Eternity of real Divinity. Many stand in Admiration, that the Sun, and Moon, and Stars, have been so long time in Motion, and move so swiftly, from East to West, and return into their Circles without Intermission : and the thing would be admirable indeed, but that we know them to be carried by an Omnipotent God, who supports all things by the Word of his Power. Others again cannot but wonder that the infernal Fire shall not be consumed by eternally burning, nor the Bodies of those Wretches be dissolved by perpetual frying in Flames. And, indeed, this might not only be accounted wonderful, but impossible too, were not He, who makes that Fire, so to burn continually, that it never

should be quench'd; and that so preserves the Bodies of those tormented in that Fire, that they should eternally be tortur'd, and never consum'd; were not He, I say, that thus orders it, an Omnipotent and Eternal God. And lastly, others wonder, that God supports and upholds all things, and undergoes no Fatigue in sustaining so vast a Bulk, of almost an infinite Weight. For, a Man of Might and Strength, an Horse, an Ox, or Elephant, can bear a considerable Weight, for a short inconsiderable time; but to bear the whole Weight of Nature and Creation without Pain or Wearisomness, for Eternal Ages, surpasses the Power of all created things. But they had reason to wonder, if God had Strength in Weight and Measure, as all created things have: but since the Power of God is without Stint or Limitation, and he is infinite in every respect; it is not strange if infinite Strength can eternally bear the most ponderous Bulk, without being fatigu'd or tir'd. Let us therefore cry out with the Prophet *Moses, Who, O Lord amongst the mighty is like unto thee?*

C H A P. III.

Height **T**HE next thing to be consider'd, is the Height of God's Power, which is plac'd especially in two things. For in the first place, his Omnipotency may be said to reach a very great height, because He alone hath made those things which are most High and Eminent.

The

The things which are below the Moon, God alone made at the first Creation of things : but the same things by the Agency of Creatures, may be generated, transmuted, corrupted : for the Elements are transmuted one into another, as to the Parts of each, and out of the Earth are produced Herbs and Trees ; and Animals are propagated from Animals ; Fishes breed in Water : Clouds and Rain in the Air ; Comets in the Fire. But Heaven, and the Stars, which are Bodies of a very great height, were created by God alone, as they are preserved by him ; nor has any Creature the least Agency, either in the making, altering, dissolving, or preserving them. *I see the Heavens, saith the Prophet, the Work of thy Hands, the Moon, and the Stars which thou hast ordained.* Psal. 8. For the highest and most noble Works, the most High hath reserv'd for Himself, He began to frame them from the very Foundation, and 'twas He that brought them to their Height and Perfection. So likewise Spiritual things, as Angels, and the Souls of Men, which are the most noble and sublime Works of all, these God alone by his infinite Power hath created, and doth preserve, and will for ever secure from Annihilation and Corruption. Nor have Creatures any share in the Creation of these things ; and tho' they should unite their whole Force, they would not be able either to produce, or destroy, one Angel, or one Soul. In the next Place the height of Divine Power is manifestly seen in Miracles, which, as St. *Augustine* tells us "are Works beside the ordinary Course and Order of Nature, which happen to

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Jof. 10.

“ the Admiration and Astonishment of all Nature, and Angels themselves. What Angel was not astonish'd, when at the Command of *Joshua*, the Sun, and Moon, who run their Course with incredible Speed, did on a sudden stand still ? And that we may not suppose this to have been a fortuitous Accident, (nor, indeed, can any Man imagine, that so extraordinary a thing should be wrought by mortal Man, whose Station was on Earth) the Holy Spirit tells us, that God obey'd the Voice of Man. Nor did *Joshua* properly speak to the Sun and Moon themselves, whom he knew incapable of hearing his Command, but directed his Prayers to the Lord, and must be understood to speak after this manner ; Thou Sun, at God's Command, stand still upon *Gibeon*, and thou Moon in the Valley of *Ajalon*. But the Lord obeyed the Voice of Man, that is, he made those Lights obey the Voice of Man. For in the sacred Oracles, God is said to do those things, which he causes to be done. Thus in *Genesis*, when the Lord saith unto *Abraham*, Now I know that thou fearest God : the Meaning is, now have I caused, that both thou thy self, and others, may know, that thou really and truly fearest God. Of this kind also was that Work, denoting the height of Divine Power, when the Moon, at the Passion of our Lord, which then was at the greatest distance from the Sun, came to the Sun with a most rapid Course, and being under it three Hours, caus'd Darkness in the Earth ; and when those three Hours were over, returned with the same inexpressible Speed to the Place from whence it came.

All

All which St. *Dionysius* the *Areopagite* affirms that he saw, and made Observations upon it. And this Miracle, indeed, is contrary to the former, but not less wonderful, it being equally strange and unaccountable, and above the Power of Nature in general, either to stop the Moon in her Course, or force it to a greater Speed. I pass by those Miracles of giving Sight to the Blind, and of raising the Dead, and many other of that sort, which God wrought by his Prophets, Apostles, and others of his faithful Servants, all which things cry out, *Who, O Lord, amongst the mighty is like unto thee?*

But I cannot omit that last and greatest Miracle, which God will exhibit at the End of the World, when all that have died in so many Ages shall rise together, tho' the Bodies of most are crumbled into Dust and Ashes; tho' some have been devoured by wild Beasts, and so have been converted into several Bodies; tho' others have been buried in Gardens and Fields, and have been transmuted into several kinds of Herbs. Which of the Angels will not be in amaze, to see, at the Almighty's Command, so many Millions of Men resume, at the twinkling of an Eye, their own Bodies, tho' they have disappear'd for many Ages, tho' the manner of their Deaths have been very different, and the Particles of each Body very distantly dispers'd? This demonstrates such an height of Divine Power, that with respect thereto we may likewise say, *Who, O God, amongst the mighty is like unto thee?*

Day of Judgment

C H A P IV.

Depth

THERE remains for our Consideration the Depth of Divine Power, which seems to consist in those Ways and Methods which God makes use of in his Works of Creation. For who can dive into his way of making something out of nothing? Those could not see into this Depth, who concluded upon this as a try'd and certain Principle, that out of nothing, nothing is made. And we also in this matter, believe what we do not see. But we confidently rely on God, who cannot deceive : we believe, I say, that Heaven and Earth, and all that therein is, were created by God himself, and that there was no precedent Matter to work upon. Nor had God, indeed, made all things that are made, had there been any thing prepar'd to make them of. But how, or by what means, any thing could be made, whereof there was no precedent Matter, is a very profound Abyss, which we are not able to search into, and find out. But further, God did not only make all things out of Nothing, but made them also in Nothing ; that is, without precedent Space, or Place, wherein that might be dispos'd which was made, which, in corporeal things especially, can hardly be conceiv'd. Here therefore is likewise an impenetrable Abyss. *Take away*, saith St. Augustine in his Epistle to *Dardanus*, *Space of Place from Bodies, and they will not be any where, and be-*
cause

cause they shall not be any where, they will have no Being at all. Therefore if there were nothing before God created Heaven and Earth, where did God place Heaven and Earth? They could not certainly be placed in nothing, and yet created they are, and are themselves place to themselves, because He that is Omnipotent both would, and could have it so, tho' our Understanding cannot comprehend how it comes to be so.

To this God alluded when, pleas'd to discover his Omnipotency to holy *Job*, he said, *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the Earth, Job 3 declare if thou hast Understanding, who laid the Measures thereof, if thou canst tell? or who hath stretched the Line upon it? upon what are the Foundations fasten'd? or who laid the Corner-stone thereof?* And for our fuller Conviction that these Works of Divine Omnipotency do merit the greatest Commendation, the same Lord immediately subjoyns, *When the Morning Stars sung my Praises together, and all the Sons of God shouted for Joy.* For the holy Angels who were created together with Heaven and Earth, and are as it were, spiritual, bright, and glorious Stars, so that they seem worthy, in some measure, of the glorious Appellation of God's Sons, when they saw Heaven and Earth start out of nothing, and plac'd in nothing, and yet solidly founded upon their own Basis, they prais'd the Omnipotent Architect with great Admiration and Rejoycing.

Nor doth this Consideration less perplex the Understanding, that God, by the sole Command of his Will, erected such immense and vast Fabricks. For we know that in
Build-

Buildings no ways comparable for Greatness, how many Instruments, Engines, and Labourers, the Master-Builders have Occasion for. Who then by studying can find out, how Works of such stupendous Greatness, and such admirable Variety, should be accomplished merely by Virtue of the internal Will, which never goeth out of him that willeth? God spake, (to himself no doubt, for the Word of God is in God, and is God himself) he spake, I say, by commanding, and expressing the Power of Will: Let the Heavens be made, and they were made; let the Earth be made, and it was made; let there be Light, let there be Sun, let there be Stars, let there be Trees, let there be living Creatures, let there be Men, let there be Angels, and without more ado they were all made. To this add, that the same God, were he so pleas'd, can, with only one Beck, destroy all these things, and the Universe together. But there is yet another Depth behind, and is this, that God made all these things, so wonderful for Multitude and Greatness, and variety of Parts, and Members, in one Moment of Time. With us, the Works of Art, and Nature require length of time to be brought to Perfection. We see that Herbs are sown a considerable time, before they are grown up: Trees require some Years to take Root, to spread their Branches, and bring forth Fruit; living Creatures carry their young a great while in the Womb, and after feed them a long time before they can shift for themselves. I need say nothing of Arts, every one knows that a little time is insufficient,

ficient, even to the most Ingenious, to perfect and compleat their Works.

How great then is the Divine Power, which brings the mightiest things to Perfection in less time than we can mention them? Nor do I enquire whether God finish'd Heaven and Earth, and all that is therein, in one moment? Or whether his first Creation of Things took him up six entire Days? for my business is not to solve Questions, but to contrive helps to Ascend to God from the consideration of Things. This is then what I assert, and stand amazed at, that every particular thing had the first and last Stroke from the Omnipotent Creator's Hand in one moment of Time. As for Earth, and Water, and Air, and Fire, there is a general Agreement that they were made in a Moment; and likewise, that Angels were so made. Touching the Firmament, and the division of Waters, it is well known, that all these were made by the sole virtue of the Word, saying, *Let there be a Firmament in the midst of the Waters*, and that too in a Moment; for it follows, *And they were made*. St. Chrysostome saith, He did but speak, and the Work follow'd. And upon these words, *Let the Earth bring forth the green Herb, and it was so*, he thus flourishes: Who can consider, and not be amazed, that these few words of the Lord, *Let the Earth bring forth*, should beautifie the face of it with various Flowers, as with a Garment curiously embroidered. You might have seen the Earth, which was before deform'd and uncultivated, all on a sudden vie, in a manner, with Heaven it self, for Beauty and Ornament.

Earth, Air
Water
Angels
The Firmament

ment. And afterwards, upon these words, *Let there be Light*, he thus reflects ; He did but speak, and this admirable Instrument, the Sun, was created. What if we should add, that in the same Moment, and by the same Word, the same Creator made the Moon, and all the Stars. And upon these words, *Let the Waters bring forth*, &c. he thus descants, What Tongue can sufficiently express the Creator's Praise ? For as he only said of the Earth, *Let it bring forth*, and it was immediately enamell'd with infinite Flowers and Herbs of several kinds ; so now he only says, *Let the Waters bring forth*, and there were instantly created, so many kinds of creeping and flying Creatures as cannot be recounted. *Who therefore amongst the mighty is like unto thee, O Lord ?*

CHAP. V.

AND now, my Soul, thou art fully inform'd, how great the Power of thy Creator is, which, as to Breadth, extends itself to all things ; as to Length, is of eternal duration, and which supports and governs all things without fatigue or wearisomness : As for Height, reacheth to the making those things which not only seem, but really are impossible to all but God : As for Depth, doth so effect and bring about things, that the manner of his Operations is above created Understanding, because he makes all things of nothing, in nothing, without Instruments, and Time, only by his Word and Command.

He

He spake, saith the Prophet, and they were made; Psal. 149.
be commanded, and they were created. From

which, if thou art wise, thou wilt inferr,
 how much it concerns thee, whether God
 is pleas'd or angry with thee; whether he is
 thy Friend or thine Enemy: For if thou hast
 incurr'd his Displeasure, and provok'd his An-
 ger, he can strip thee in a Moment of all
 those things wherein thou hast plac'd thy
 Delight; and inflict all kinds of Miseries up-
 on thee, from which thou canst not be deli-
 vered, for who can encounter Omnipotency?
 Should it be thy Fortune to meet thine im-
 placable Enemy, when thou art naked, and
 unarm'd, and he should assault thee with an
 Instrument of Death, what would'st thou do?
 How would'st thou Sweat, grow Pale, and
 Tremble, and falling upon thy Knees, how
 earnestly would'st thou beg for Mercy? And
 yet such an Enemy is no more than Man;
 and it may be, that either by running away,
 or by resistance, or by disarming him, thou
 might'st escape Death: But what wilt thou
 do with an offended God, from whom there
 is no making thy escape, because he is in all
 places; against whom Resistance doth not sig-
 nifie any thing, because he is Omnipotent;
 nor canst thou put any stop to his Proceedings,
 for his Order and Execution go hand in hand.
 Therefore the Apostle had good reason to say,
It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Heb. 10.
living God. But, on the contrary, if God is
 thy Friend, and thou art his Favourite, who
 can be in a more happy condition than thou?
 For he is able to enrich thee with all Good
 Things; and if he is thy Friend, he is no less
 wil,

- willing than able so to do, and withal to deliver thee from all Evils. It is in thy power, whilst on this side the Grave, to render him either a God of Anger and Vengeance, or a tender Father and compassionate Friend : for God, both by the Prophets in the first place, and then by his Son and Apostles in the Holy Scriptures, is perpetually calling to us, inviting Sinners to Repentance, and the Righteous to keep his Commandments, that so he may account the one and the other his most dear Children, and Heirs of his eternal Kingdom. Hear what is said in *Ezekiel*, *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live ; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel ?* And a little after, *As for the wickedness of the wicked he shall not fall thereby, whenever he shall turn from his Wickedness.* And *Esaias* and *Jeremy*, and the other Prophets confirm what *Ezekiel* saith, for they were all influenced by one Spirit, which made them proclaim one and the same thing. Hear the Son of God, when he began to preach : *Jesus began (saith Matthew) to preach and to say, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.* Hear *Paul* the Apostle speaking of himself and his Fellow-Apostles, in his second Epistle to the *Corinthians*, *We are, saith he, Ambassadors for*
- Ch. 33.
- Ch. 4.
- 2 Cor. 5.
- Christ, as though Christ did exhort you by us, we beseech you in the name of Christ, be ye reconciled unto God. What can be more plain ? what more comfortable ? The Apostle in the name of Christ, beseeches us to be reconcil'd to God, intreats and begs, that we would propitiate*

pitiate him, and not provoke him to anger against us. Who now can have any doubt of God's being mercifully inclin'd to us, if we heartily return unto him? There is no doubt but he will receive those that return, as that most indulgent Father receiv'd his Prodigal Son. But after our return and obtaining Pardon, what doth he require of us, in order to continue his Friends, and his Sons, but to keep his Commandment? *If thou wilt enter into Life, saith our Lord, keep the Commandments.*

Obj. And lest thou should'st be tempted to say, without the Divine Assistance there can be no keeping of the Commandments.

Sol. Hear St. *Augustin*, in his explication of the Psalms, who speaking of that Commandment, which imports the greatest difficulty of all, that is, of laying down our Life for our Brethren, doth use these words; *God would not command us to do this, if he adjudg'd it impossible for Man to do it. And if, considering thine Infirmary, thou faintest under the Commandment, strengthen thy self by Example.* And indeed Example is very significant to thee: *He that gave the Example, is ready, and at hand to aid and succour thee.* And that in the Mouth of two Witnesses every Word may be established, hear St. *Leo*, God, saith he, doth justly insist upon the Observation of his Commands, because his Grace is ready to co-operate with our Endeavours. Why then, my Soul, art thou afraid to betake thy self boldly to the way thou art commanded to walk in, when thou art accompanied by him, who by the mighty efficacy of his Grace, makes what is crooked strait, and rough ways plain? By the concurrency of this
Grace

Grace the Yoke of the Lord is made easie, and his Burden light : And St. *John* affirms, that *his Commandments are not grievous* : But if they should seem grievous, consider how much more grievous the Torments of Hell will be; nor wilt thou adventure, if thou art not besides thy self, to make the Experiment. But consider this again and again, and never let it slip out of thy Mind, that Now is the season of Mercy, that Hereafter will be the time of Judgment: that Now thou art at liberty to offend, Hereafter a necessity will be laid upon thee of suffering most grievous Punishment: That Now we may, without difficulty, transact and accommodate Matters with God; and, with a little labour of Repentance, obtain Favour and Pardon; and with a short Sorrow, buy off everlasting Lamentation; and, contrariwise, that the Kingdom of Heaven may now be purchas'd by good Works, proceeding from the virtue of Charity; that Hereafter one drop of cold Water cannot be procur'd with the Wealth of the Universe.

THE

Twelfth Step.

From the Consideration of the greatness of the Wisdom of God, by similitude of Corporeal Greatness.

CHAP. I.

HOW far the Apostle was in the right, when in the close of his Epistle to the Romans, he affirms, *That God is only* Rom. 16. *wise*, whoever will attentively consider the breadth, length, height, and depth of Divine Wisdom, will easily understand. And to begin with Breadth; there needs nothing to evince the Wisdom of God to be infinitely broad, but to consider, that he perfectly and distinctly knows all things in nature, from the most glorious Angel, to the most despicable Worm: Nor do intire Substances only fall within his Knowledge, but he is acquainted also with their Parts, Properties, Powers, Accidents and Actions. From hence are those sayings, *Thou tellest my Steps*; and, *The Lord hath respect to the ways of Man, and considereth all his goings*. Now, if he number and con- sider

Mat. 10.

Chap. 1.

sider every Step, how much more the Actions
 of the Mind, whether they are good or bad?
 And if God hath numbred our very Hairs,
 according to the Saying of our Lord, *The*
hairs of your head are all numbred; how much
 rather doth he know all the Members of our
 Bodies, and all the Faculties of our Minds?
 And if he knows the number of the Sands of
 the Sea, and of the drops of Rain, as is in-
 ferr'd from *Ecclesiasticus*; how much rather
 may we conclude, that he knows the number
 of the Stars, and Angels? And if he shall
 bring every idle word that Men shall utter,
 into Judgment, as our Lord himself testifies,
 then doubtless he must hear at one and the
 same time the words of all Men; and not on-
 ly those words which are uttered by the Or-
 gans of the Body, but even those of the
 Mind, that is, Mens Thoughts and Desires.
 How great then and how unmeasurable is this
 Latitude of Wisdom, which comprehends all
 things at once, which are, have been, which
 shall be, and which are capable of being?
 Nor is it any disparagement to the Divine
 Mind, that so many, and such mean things
 fall under his Cognizance, as the infatuated
 Wisdom of some Philosophers hath fancied.
 We might perhaps suspect such a thing, if
 God, as we, did derive his Knowledge from
 Things; but when he seeth all things in his
 Essence, there is no danger of disparagement.
 And yet 'tis far more noble to attain to Wis-
 dom by searching and inquiring after it,
 which is proper to Man, than to be utterly
 devoid of it, which is the case of Brutes; as
 it is better to be blind, which is proper to
 Ani-

Animals, than without Blindness to be incapable of seeing, which is the Case of Stones. Nor are the other Members of the Body more noble than the Eyes, because they cannot be blind, but the Eyes are more noble than they, as having the Faculty of seeing, tho' they are in a capacity of becoming blind, as St. *Augustin* very well argues in his Book *De Civitate Dei*. And upon this account, my Soul, thou oughtest to be very careful at all times and places, to regulate thy Thoughts, Words, and Actions, according to divine direction, because there is not a Thought, Word, or Action, but what is seen, heard, and observ'd by God. For if thou wouldest not adventure to act, or speak any thing amiss, tho' thy Inclinations did earnestly sollicit thee thereto, wert thou perswaded that only a Man did hear or see thee; how darest thou so much as harbour a wicked Thought, whilst God beholds with Indignation? "Admit," saith St. *Augustine*, a Man could escape humane Eyes, what will he do with that Celestial Overseer, from whom nothing is concealed. And St. *Basil* in his Book of *Virginity*, speaking to a Virgin shut up in her Closet, and alone, doth admonish her to reverence her Spouse, who is every where present, as likewise God the Father, with the Holy Ghost, and the innumerable Company of Angels, and together with them the holy Spirits of the Fathers: For, saith he, there is not one of all these, who seeth not all things in all Places. O happy Soul of mine, wert thou at all times sensible, of thy being plac'd on a conspicuous Theatre, even in the grossest

ness, and profoundest Silence ; how perfect a Life wouldest thou lead ! how carefully wouldest thou avoid all Irreverence, and all wandering of Thought ! For this is what the Lord sometimes said to the Patriarch *Abraham*, *Walk before me, and be thou perfect* ; that is, consider that thou art ever in my Sight, and then thou wilt not fail to be perfect.

CHAP. II.

THE Length of Divine Wisdom manifests it self in the Knowledge of things future : for God has such a penetrating Sight, that from Eternity, he saw what should happen to the end of Time, and beyond that, to Eternity : to which Length there can be nothing added, no, not in Imagination. *Thou understandest*, saith *David* in the Psalms, *my thoughts afar off* : and a little after, *Thou knowest all things*, i. e. the things that are now, those that have been of old, and such as shall be hereafter. The Prophetical Books abound with very clear, and very true Predictions, which they spoke not of themselves, but as *Zacharias* sings, *God spake by the mouth of his holy Prophets, which have been since the world began*. And this fore-seeing things future, and predicting when they should happen, is so proper to God alone, that He himself saith by *Esaïas*, *Declare the things that shall be hereafter, and by this we shall know that ye are Gods*. And that we may consider a few Passages out of many : *Esaïas* hath these Words, *Thus saith the*

139.

Luke 1.

Esaï. 45.

the Lord to his Anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue Nations before him, and turn the backs of Kings, &c. Where the Monarchy of the *Persians* is fortold, and the first King of the *Persians* is called by his proper Name, *Cyrus*; and a reason is subjoyn'd, why God would exalt *Cyrus*, viz. because he should loose the *Babylonish* Captivity: all which things were accomplished about two hundred Years after. *Daniel* likewise by the Similitude of an huge Statue, whose Head was of Gold, the Breast Silver, the Belly and Thighs Brass, the Feet part of Iron, and part of Clay, very plainly foretells the four Monarchies, of the *Babylonians*, *Persians*, *Grecians*, and *Romans*: and under the last Empire, he foretells the Kingdom of Christ, that is, the Christian Church, and that it should be greater than all these. And then so plainly describes the Wars of the Successors of *Alexander* the Great, that some Heathens have suspected the Account not to be given till after the Wars were finished. And to omit other Passages, Christ himself, lamenting in *Luke* the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, which was to happen many Years after, describes every thing so distinctly, and particularly, as if he were not prophesying of what was to come, but relating what had already happen'd. I omit many other Predictions, wherewith, as I said before, the Books of the Prophets abound. Now Astrologers, and all other Diviners, who would seem to be the Apes of God, are to be laugh'd at, and exploded. Nor is it possible they should give a true Account of future Contingencies, especially in things at Liberty, unless

unless they casually hit upon Truth. For whereas the Will of God superintends, and presides over all Causes, necessary, contingent, and free, and can hinder inferior Causes, when he pleases; no Man can foretell any thing with certainty, but he to whom God is pleas'd to manifest his Will, as he often did to the Prophets. And this is so true, that the Devils especially affected to be accounted Gods hereby, because they gave out Oracles, and foretold Futurities, as St. *Augustine* attests in his Books *De Civitate Dei*. But the same eminent Doctor of the Church, in his Book of the Divination of Demons, plainly demonstrates, that their Divination is as false as their Divinity. For they declare nothing in plain terms, save what they themselves will do, or what being already done, in some other Place, they having the advantage of natural Quickness, relate as future to those that are remote; or what, according to their long Experience of the Course of Nature, they conjecture will happen: As Mariners use to foretell Storms; Husbandmen Rain; Physicians Diseases. But these Demons being interrogated about future Events, of which they are ignorant, they either answer indirectly, or in Equivocal Terms; and when they are accused of Falshood, and Mistake, they charge their Inquirers with Dulness, in not rightly apprehending their Answer. Therefore the Lord our God, of whose Wisdom there is no bounds, is the only Oracle of Truth; and foretells what is true of all things future, even of things contingent, and free.

C H A P. III.

NOW the Height of Divine Wisdom is very lofty indeed, and very far surpasseth the Sublimity of Human or Angelical Wisdom. The Height of Wisdom is known by the Excellency of its Object, Power, Species, and Acting. The Object of Divine Wisdom, both Natural, and Adequate, is the Divine Essence it self, which is high in such a transcendent Degree, that it is not a proportionate Object either to Humane, or Angelical Understanding. Therefore the Angels of the very supream Order, cannot ascend so high as to see God, except they are lifted up by the light of Glory. And this is the reason why God in holy Writ, is said to be invisible; *To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God*; saith the Apostle in his former Epistle to *Timothy*. Who also tells us in another Place, that *God dwells in light that cannot be approach'd*. Then secondly, Power, which in us is an Accident, in God is a Divine Substance, and therefore is in Him in a much nobler and higher Degree than in us. And then thirdly, Species is by so much the more eminent, by how much the more things it represents: and therefore Angels, the more universal, and the fewer Species they have, are said to have so much the higher Knowledge. How great then is the height of Divine Wisdom, who has no other Species, but his own Essence, which is but one, and

1 Tim. 1.

Chap. 6.

is sufficient of it self alone, for God both to represent, and know, not only Himself, but all things besides, that either are created, shall, or may be created. And in the fourth and last Place, that is accounted the most noble and sublime Wisdom, which knoweth most things by the fewest Acts : but God by one only Act of Intuition, which still continues vigorous and immutable in him, perfectly knows both Himself, and all other things. The Wisdom therefore of God, has the Pre-eminence, and ought to be term'd the most High.

Lift up now, my Soul, thine Eyes, and see how vast a difference there is betwixt thy Knowledge, and the Wisdom of thy Creator. For thou by many Acts in running backward and forward, this way, and that way, canst hardly attain to a perfect Knowledge of some one thing : but on the contrary, thy Creator, by one only Act, most clearly and distinctly sees Himself, and all things beside. And yet thou thy self, huddled up as thou art in Darkness, mayest ascend upon the Wings of Faith and Love, to such an height, that after thou hast laid aside this mortal Body, and shalt be chang'd from Glory to Glory, in the Light of God, thou mayest see God, who is Light ; and being made like unto God, thou also at one View, and that continuing for ever, shalt be able to see God in Himself, as also thy self, and all things that are created in God, at the self same time. For what is there, (saith St. Gregory in his Dialogues) *that he doth not see, who beholds him that seeth all things ?* And what Pleasure, what Glory, what Plenary of all things shalt thou find, when admitted

ted to inaccessible Light, thou shalt partake of all the Treasures of thy Lord? The Queen of *Sheba* in hearing the Wisdom of *Solomon*, and beholding the regular Order amongst the Servants of his House, was astonish'd even to Extasy, and at last thus cry'd out; *Happy are these thy Men, and these thy Servants, who stand continually before thee, and hear thy Wisdom.* And what proportion is there between the Wisdom of *Solomon*, and the Wisdom of *God*, who is not only wise, but Wisdom it self? And what is the Regularity and Order of *Solomon's* Servants, compared with that of the several Orders of Angels, of whom *thousands of thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him*? Surely if thou hast but the least relish of these things, thou wouldest run all Hazards, thou wouldest undergo the greatest Labour, and willingly suffer the greatest smart to gain the Favour of God. Humble thy self therefore under the mighty Hand of God, that he may exalt thee in the day of Visitation. Humble thy Understanding, and make it obedient to Faith, that thou mayest be exalted to Vision. Bring down thy Will to the Obedience of the Commandments, that thou mayest be exalted to the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God: enure thy outward Man to Patience and Labours, that God may glorifie it, and exalt it to everlasting Peace and Quiet.

C H A P. IV.

IT remains that we consider the Depth of Divine Wisdom, which seems especially to consist in searching out the Reins and Hearts, that is, in the Knowledge of Men's Thoughts, and Desires, especially of such as they shall hereafter entertain. From hence proceed these Sayings, *Man seeth the things that appear, but the Lord looketh into the Heart : and thou only knowest the Hearts of the Sons of Men.* Thus in Psalm 139, *Thou understandest my Thoughts afar off, thou compassest my Path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my Ways ; and in another Place, He knoweth the Secrets of the Heart.* So *Jeremy, The Heart of Man is wicked and unsearchable, who shall know it ? I the Lord who search the Heart and the Reins.* Which Place the seventy thus render, *The Heart of Man is deep, and unsearchable.* And *St. Jerome* expounding this Place, doth put us in mind that the Divinity of Christ is from hence fully prov'd, because he discovered the Thoughts of Men, which God alone can see into. Thus we read, *When Jesus perceiv'd their thoughts : But he knew their thoughts : And, Why do ye think these things in your hearts.* Therefore every Thought, and every Desire of Man, even present, and really in being, are so very deep, that neither Angels, Devils, nor Men, can dive so far as to find them out: but yet a future Thought or Desire, is a much greater Deep. Men and Angels are so far from

1 King. 16

2 Chro. 6.

27.

Mat. 9.

Luke 6.

from penetrating into these, that they cannot so much as conceive the Methods of God, (who only knows them,) in his Inquiry and Search into them. And this *David* seems desirous to signify when he saith, *Such Knowledge is too wonderful for me*, i. e. Such Knowledge is so mysterious that I cannot understand the reason of it : *It is high, and I cannot attain unto it* : that is, it lies out of my reach, and I can by no means comprehend the reason of it. But he speaks of the Knowledge of future Thoughts. For he had said, *Thou didst understand my thoughts afar off, and didst foresee all my ways*. Of the fore-knowledge therefore of these Thoughts, and these Ways, he thus saith, *This Knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it* : To this perhaps it may be answer'd, that God sees these future Thoughts in his Eternity, to which all things are present, or in the pre-determination of his Will. But were it so, such Knowledge would not be wonderful : for we ourselves can easily tell what we will do, or what things are present, and before our Eyes. But the Scripture saith, that God searcheth the Reins, and Hearts, and there sees what Men desire, and muse upon, and what Thoughts and Desires shall afterwards be lodged there. Now this is admirable indeed, how God, by searching the Reins, and Hearts, can see what is not yet in Being there, and what depends on the Choice of the Will, whether ever it shall be. Therefore as it belongs to the height of Divine Power, to make something out of nothing, and to call the things which are not, but shall be, as the things

things which are ; so it belongs to the Depth of Divine Wisdom, that by searching the Reins and Hearts, he can see what is not yet there, as if it now were, and which without peradventure shall be there.

CHAP. V.

Lam. 3.

BUT my business being, not to dispute, but to elevate the Soul towards God ; rouse up therefore thy self, my Soul, and mount above thy self, as *Jeremy* advises, and consider that profound Abyss of Divine Wisdom, which searches the inner parts of the Heart, and discerns many things there, which the Heart it self sees not. O blessed *Peter*, when thou saidst unto thy Lord, *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee* : Certainly thou didst not dissemble, but spakest in sincerity and uprightness of heart : nor didst thou see that Infirmity in thine Heart, which was visible to thy Lord, when he said, *Before the Cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice*. For the most skilful Physician, saw an Infirmity in thine Heart, which was conceal'd from thee : and that was true which the Physician foretold, not what the Patient boasted of. But be thankful to thy Physician, who, as he foresaw, and foretold thy Distemper, so by inciting thee to Repentance, applied an effectual Remedy to thy Soul, and recover'd thee from thy Sicknes. O gracious, holy, most wise, and powerful Physician, cleanse me from all my secret Offences. What foul Sins am I
guil-

guilty of, which I neither sorrow for, nor wash away with my Tears, because I see 'em not? Thou who searchest the Reins, and the Hearts, vouchsafe me evermore the Assistance of thy Grace: Thou who seest all things, discover to me those corrupt Desires, and evil Works which I do not discern: and looking mercifully upon me, open such a Fountain of Tears, that before it is too late, all my Sins may be wash'd off, and done away by thy Grace. *Amen.*

THE

T H E
Thirteenth Step.

*From the Consideration of God's Practical
Wisdom.*

C H A P. I.

WE have consider'd the Wisdom of God as it is in Theory : his Practical Wisdom falls now under Consideration, which also we may call his effectuating Wisdom. This Wisdom hath its Breadth, Length, Height, and Depth. The Breadth is known by Creation, the Length by the Preservation of things created, the Height by the Work of Redemption, the Depth by Providence and Predestination.

Pfal. 104. And, to begin with Creation, God made all things in Wisdom, as the Psalmist saith, and hath pour'd it out upon all his Works, as Ecclesiasticus writes. As therefore by the Creation of all things out of nothing, we know the Power, so by the admirable Contrivance, which is visible in every Part, we admire the Wisdom of the Creator. For he hath disposed things in general, and every thing in particular,

clar, in measure, number, and weight, as the Wise Man tells us. And this is the Saviour Wisd. 11. wherewith God hath season'd all things: by this Saviour we come to understand how refining Wisdom is, how amiable and desirable a thing. All things then which are created, have a certain Measure,* a certain Number, and a certain Weight, both to distinguish them from God, who hath no Measure because he is Immenſe; nor Number, because he is perfectly One, and ſimple as to his Eſſence; nor Weight, because his Price and Value ſurpaſs all Price and Value: and alſo as they are good and beautiful; and *Moses* very truly ſaid, *God ſaw all things which he had made, and they were very good.* All created things then have ſuch a Measure as is neceſſary to attain that end for which they are made, nor can any thing be added to, or taken from, that Measure, but the thing will be render'd deformed, or uſeleſs, and therefore not ſo good as it was: God, ſaith *Eccleſiaſtes*, *made all things good in their ſeaſon, nor can we add to, nor take from, thoſe things which God hath made, that he might be feared.* Therefore to the Heavens God hath aſſign'd a very ſpacious Measure, becauſe they are to encompass all things that are beneath them: to the Air he hath given a Measure much ſhorter than that of Heaven, but greater than to the Earth and Waters, which make one Globe, and are incloſ'd on all ſides by the Air. To the Elephant he hath given a Body of an huge bulk, to enable him to carry ponderous Burdens, and to bear up under a Tower full of Men. The Horſe he hath made leſs, becauſe he

he was design'd to carry only one Rider. He hath made the Birds small, that they might build their Nests in the Branches of Trees. He hath made Bees and Ants very minute, that they may hide themselves in Holes, either of Hives, or in the Earth. The very same thing we may say of Number. God hath created one Sun only, because one is sufficient to illustrate the whole Earth, and make Day by its brightness. He hath likewise made but one Moon, because one is enough to illuminate the Night ; but Stars he would have in great abundance, that in the absence of Sun and Moon, which happens in their Conjunction, they might in some measure dispel the Darknes of Night. Nor has he only appointed a necessary number to all things in general, but hath likewise so constituted the number of Parts in particular things, that no Addition nor Diminution can be made. God hath given Man two Eyes, two Ears, two Hands, two Feet, one Nose, one Mouth, one Breast, one Head, and thus he appears a very beautiful and comely Creature. Invert the Order, and make up a Man with one Eye, and two Noses, with one Ear, and two Mouths, with one Hand, and one Foot, two Breasts, and two Heads, nothing could be contriv'd more ugly, nothing more unfit for Service. Lastly, God hath given Weight, that is, such Estimation to every thing, as its Nature required. Now by the Name of Weight, or Estimation, we understand Qualities, which make things good and valuable. For there are three things which give all things their Perfection ; first, Num-
ber,

Number of Parts, which is necessary that no part be wanting: Secondly, Commensuration, or a fit proportion of parts; Lastly, internal or external Qualities, as loveliness of Colour in the outward superficies of the Body, and inward Vertue, or Power; which is useful or necessary for performance of divers Actions which we are necessarily engag'd in. But the great Power which God hath endow'd some very minute and small things with, is wonderful indeed, and looks as if he were pleas'd to shew his Power in great things, and his Wisdom in small. Who is able to conceive what great virtue there is in a Grain of Mustard-seed, which is so very small, that we can scarce take a distinct view of it, and yet produces so great a Tree, that Birds may lodge in the Branches thereof, as he who is Truth it self tells us in his Gospel? Nor is such Virtue only proper to this, but common to all Seeds, in which are virtually contain'd the Roots, the Trunk, Branches, Leaves, Flowers, and Fruits of the greatest Plants. Doubtless had we not learn'd this by certain experience, Men could hardly be perswaded, that from so small a Seed, so vast a bulk of things, and of things so very different, could ever spring. Who also could conceive, that in an Ant, a Flea, a Fly, and such very little Animals, there should be nimble Feet, an Head, an Heart, external and internal Senses, nay, that there is in some, though uncertain measure, both Prudence, and Judgment in them? Who, lastly, could conceive that such small, and, in appearance, such despicable Creatures as these, should be able

to penetrate, and skrew themselves into live Fleh; and that even a Gnat should awe and terrifie Lyons and Elephants, those mighty Animals? Great therefore is the Lord, and great is his Wisdom, as well in the smallest, as greatest things. *Galen*, that Prince of Physicians, admir'd, though an Heathen, the Divine Artifice, which appear'd in a Mans Hand, and burst out into the Creator's praise. What, O Christian, oughtest thou to do who art assured, that not only the Bodies of Men and other Creatures; but also the Heavens, and Stars, and Angels, and Mens immortal Spirits were made with most exquisite skill by the same most wise Creator?

CHAP. II.

NOW the length of practical Wisdom illustriously appears in the Preservation of things, as we have already affirm'd the breadth of it doth in the Creation. Therefore the great and admirable Wisdom of God is seen in his preservation of created things, and giving them power to last, such things especially as are of a corruptible Nature.

And in the first place, if a Man consider how God nourisheth Herbs, Plants, living Creatures, and Mens Bodies themselves, and makes them to thrive and grow, that their Beginnings may be of a lasting Duration, amazing even to Stupefaction he cannot sufficiently admire the Divine Wisdom. For He nourisheth Herbs and Plants from Earth and Water.

ter, and makes the Nutriment pass from the Roots to the Trunk, and from this conveys it upwards by an invisible hand to the Branches, Leaves, and Fruits, and makes it penetrate all parts in a wonderful way and manner. So likewise from Herbs, and Fruits of Trees, and from the very Flesh of living Creatures, he nourisheth other Animals, yea, Men themselves, and makes the nutriment reach to, and penetrate all the parts of the Body with incredible ease and pleasure. God deals like a very expert and good-natur'd Physician, who knows how to temper his Medicines, that the Patients may take them without either difficulty or reluctancy. For Meats certainly are Physick, which unless frequently taken by poor Mortals, they must quickly return from whence they came. But God our most loving, and wise Physician, in the first place, hath put a taste and relish into Meats, that they may be taken with pleasure; and hath almost infinitely varied them, that we might not be cloy'd: And then, by various alteration in the Mouth, and Stomack, in the Liver and Heart, converts the meat into Juice so thin and subtle, that without cutting out a way, or giving any pain, it may pass through all the great, and small Veins, and pores of the Body, and may penetrate to the several Parts of the Flesh, Bones, Nerves, and all this without our perception, yea, when our Senses are lock'd up in Sleep. Philosophers in contemplation of such things, stand amazed at the Cunning and Art of Nature. But what Cunning can there be in things inanimate, and void both of Sense, and Reason?

son? It is not therefore any Cunning in Nature, which calls for admiration, but the Wisdom of the Creator, which not only made Nature, but contriv'd the way of bringing about these wonderful things. Hear the Wisdom of God speaking in the Gospel, *Consider*

Mat. 6.

the Lilies of the Field how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin, yet God clotheth them

It is God, you see, and no Cunning of Nature, who makes the Lilies to grow, and that they are so beautifully array'd. And the same may be affirm'd of the nutrition, and growth of all things living, according to that saying

1 Cor. 3.

of the Apostle, Neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.

And if the Wisdom of God doth so wonderfully feed, nourish, and preserve Plants and Animals in this mortal Life, imagine, my Soul, if thou canst, how God feeds the minds of Angels, and Men in that Life which is Eternal. For here on Earth we are supported with earthly Food, but such as is prepar'd by Divine Wisdom; but in Heaven Wisdom it self is Meat and Drink to those who live for ever. O happy thou, couldst thou fully understand the Importance of these words, *God shall be all in all*: Couldst thou comprehend what it is for God, the supreme and infinite Good, to be Food, and Raymer of Life and all things to all Saints, surely thou wouldest slight all things that are present, and wouldest have no appetite for, nor long after, any thing, but only the things which are above.

But let us proceed to the rest. This also looks miraculous, that God in preserving, and

propagating

propagating the life of Mortals, hath given to the smallest things Incessant Motion, and though of long continuance, yet unattended with fatigue. Men have beaten their Brains, and put their Invention upon the Rack, to contrive a Clock which might go a few hours without being at a stay, with once winding up. With how great wisdom then hath God contriv'd, that the nutritive Power should perpetually operate, and without the least intermission, all the time that the Plants or Animals do live? And likewise that the Lungs and Arteries should be incessantly in motion for the space of seventy or more years? For the nutritive Power must needs operate, and the Lungs and Arteries be in motion, from the beginning to the end of Life. And therefore in those who live to eighty or ninety years, the Lungs and Arteries must of necessity be moving all that time. And in the Antediluvians, who extended their Lives to nine hundred years, the Lungs and Arteries, those weak and slender things, must be in perpetual Agitation all that time, without rest or cessation. Surely, they who admire not these things, and from consideration thereof, are not astonish'd at, nor adore the Divine Wisdom, the Light of Wisdom, they may conclude, doth not shine upon them. To this we may add in the third place, that the Wisdom of God, although it could without the labour of Men and other Animals, and without the Ministry of the Sun, and other second causes, both produce and preserve Herbs and Trees, that all things living might have their proper food; yet was

he pleas'd to make use of the Ministry of second causes, and the Labour, and Industry of Men, and other Creatures, that they might not be enfeebled by laziness; but that all things might exercise their powers, and faculties. It was likewise his pleasure that amongst Men, some should be Rich, others Poor, that all might have opportunity to exercise Virtue, and might be joyn'd together by the band of Charity. For hence it comes to pass, that rich Men may exercise Liberality and Pity; and poor Men Patience and Humility; and that rich Men should stand in need of the assistance of the poor, to till their Lands, to feed their Cattle, and to provide those things by various Arts, which are necessary for all: And on the contrary, that the poor should need the assistance of the rich to be supply'd with Money and Instruments whereby they may provide themselves Food and Raiment, and other Necessaries. No have the poor any reason to complain of Divine Wisdom; for God who knows all things and loves all Men, hath given every one what is most conducive to his Attainment of everlasting Life. As with us Physicians in joyn some of their Patients a spare Dyet, and put them to the trouble of bleeding: To others they allow Wine and Flesh, and bid them make much of themselves. I question not but a great many poor Men are now Inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven, who, if a large share of this worlds Goods had befallen them, would have been ruin'd forever. And though the rich also may be saved if they endeavour to be rich in good Works

and freely part with what the God of both poor and rich entrusted them with, not to hoard up, but to communicate with the necessitous; yet it must be granted that Poverty is a safer, plainer, and more expeditious way to Heaven, than a state of Plenty and Affluence. Our Blessed Master doth not deceive us when he saith, *Verily I say unto you*, Mat. 19. *that a rich Man can hardly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: And again, Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God: And, Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation.* Nor doth the Apostle deceive us, when he affirms in his former Ep. to Tim. 1. 6. *They that will be rich fall into temptation, and into the snare of the Devil, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which sink men into destruction, and perdition.* And what our Lord, and his Apostles taught by Word, the same they confirmed by Example. For our Lord saith of himself, *Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his Head.* And the Apostle saith of himself, and of his Fellow-Apostles, *To this hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and afflicted, and have no certain place of abode.* And we cannot but conclude, that the Wisdom of God, and the Children, and Disciples of Wisdom, made choice of the most plain, and safe way to Life. But because, as the wise Man saith, *the number of fools is infinite*, there Ecclus 1. *are but few that of themselves make choice of this way, but most decline it, as if beset with briars and Thorns, or, as if a Lion were to devour it.*

The last thing in which the length of Divine Wisdom is seen, is, that as that is eternal, so the same hath implanted a very vigorous Instinct in all things of Self-preservation, and of propagating their Life, and Essence, as far as they can. We see Men, when they apprehend their lives in danger, to leave no stone unturn'd, nor to spare either Cost or Pains. We see Creatures of all kinds struggle with the more potent beyond their power, to preserve Life. We see a Candle when burning, and almost out, bestir it self several times, and put forth a great flame, insomuch that it seems to contend in very great earnest with Extinction. We sometimes see drops of Water hang upon Wood or Stone, and reduce themselves into a globular form, and keep themselves as long as they can from dispersion and destruction. We see Heavy things contrary to nature Ascend, and Light things unnaturally to Descend, that there may be no vacuum, nor they, sever'd from other things, incapable of preservation. But 'tis yet more wonderful, that, for the propagating of the Species, God hath infus'd an unconceivable Affection in Parents for their Progeny. We see a Hen that has almost kill'd her self to give life to Chickens, weak and feeble as she is, maintain a brisk fight against Kites, Dogs, and Foxes. What pains and travel Women readily undergoe, in bearing and educating Children, no Body is ignorant. This proceeds from the counsel of Divine Wisdom, who to keep up this Propagation, as a shadow of Eternity, hath impress'd a mighty love in all Animals, even in

in the most savage Brutes, towards their young. For whereas there are a great many Animals, for whose destruction Men lie in wait, either for their own profit's sake, as Hares, Boars, Deer, Thrushes, Quails, Partridges, almost all Fishes; or to keep themselves from being annoy'd, as Wolves, Foxes, Serpents, and innumerable other such Creatures; many Species of Animals, 'tis very probable, had long since perish'd, had not the Wisdom of God, by this innate affection, provided for their preservation and propagation. But if there is naturally so great an Affection in all things for this Life, which is so very short, and so full of misery, what Affection ought we to have for a life of Bliss and Immortality? O the blindness and stupidity of Mankind! all things make their utmost Efforts to preserve a momentary life, a life that is scarce so much as the shadow of Eternity, and Man thinks it not worth his while to take moderate pains for a real Eternity of a most blessed Life. All things by natural Instinct, are afraid of temporal Death, and shun it above all Evils: Man furnish'd with Reason, and instructed by Divine Faith, neither stands in dread of everlasting death, nor shuns it, at least not as he uses to dread and shun the Evils of this temporary life. So true is the affirmation of the Preacher, *The number of fools is infinite*: And that of Truth it self in the Gospel, *Narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leads to Life, and few there be that find it.* Mat. 7.

C H A P. III.

NOW the height of God's practical Wisdom is clearly discover'd in the work of Redemption. I was not sated, saith St. *Aug.* with the admirable pleasure of contemplating the height of thy Counsels, for the salvation of Mankind. It was very high counsel indeed, through the ignominy of the Cross to make up all those losses which the Wiliness of the Devil had brought upon us, by the disobedience of our first Parents, and so to make up, that the work repair'd became more beautiful than it was before it needed reparation. Four evils sprang from the sin of the first Man: First an Affront to God from the pride and disobedience of *Adam*; Secondly, punishment to the first Man, which was entail'd upon his Posterity, that is, a privation of Divine Grace, and of everlasting Happiness; Thirdly, a causing of sorrow in the Angels, who were highly displeas'd for this affront which was offer'd to God, and for the misery of Mankind; Lastly, matter of rejoicing to the Devil and malignant Spirits, who triumph'd for Man's being worsted, and overthrown by them. All these evils the Wisdom of God removed, and turn'd to a greater Good, by the mystery of the Cross: So that we may cry out, O happy error that procured such, and so great, a Redeemer! For if an Artist by Skill and Industry could so repair a new and pretious Garment, that
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by some Accident had got a rent, as to render it more neat, and valuable, that might well be termed a fortunate rent, which occasion'd this additional beauty. The first Man then being blown up into pride by the Craft and Envy of the Devil, affected to be like God, disobey'd him, and transgress'd his Commandment, and so, in a manner assum'd to himself, the honour which was due to God. But Christ the second *Adam*, who is the Wisdom of God, *humbled himself, and became obedient unto Death*, and thereby restored greater honour than that, which the first *Adam* took away by his pride and disobedience. For *Adam* was a mere Man, and had he obey'd, he would have found no difficulty in his obedience. For what great matter was it for our first Parents, to abstain from the fruits of One forbidden Tree, when they had others in Abundance, and those of the best kind? Therefore their sin indeed was very grievous, and so much the more grievous, by how much the more easie their obedience might have been, which would have imported no labour. But Christ was God and Man, and humbled himself to become obedient to his Father, in the most difficult and laborious matter, that is, the Death of the Cross, a Death full of Pain and Ignominy. If therefore the Eminency of the Person, and the profoundness of his humility, and obedience be consider'd, nothing can be imagin'd greater, or more meritorious, or more honourable to God, than Christ's lowly obedience. Therefore our Lord said very truly in the Gospel, *I have glorified thee on Earth*. For Jesus

Jesus Christ did indeed glorifie God the Father with Glory altogether inexpressible, before the Angels of God, and all the Holy Spirits of the Prophets, and others to whom these things were revealed. And if the Angels at Christ's Nativity for the Lowliness of the Manger sung, *Glory to God in the highest*, much more did they sing the same Song with greater Jubilation for the Meanness of the Cross. As to Man himself, if he had not sinned, he had, at the best, only attain'd to an Equality with Angels: But now, by the Redemption which is in Christ Jesus, Mankind hath obtain'd, that one Man should sit at the right hand of God, being exalted above all Angels, and be the Head and Lord of Angels and Men. For thus the Apostle Peter writes

1 Pet. 3.

concerning Christ; *Who is gone into Heaven, Angels and Authorities and Powers, being in subjection to him: And his Fellow-Apostle Paul*

Phil. 2.

to the Philippians; Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and hath given him a Name, which is above every Name, that at the Name of Jesus, every knee shou'd bow, of things in Heaven, in Earth, and under the Earth. Thus the Son, by the humility of his Passion, glorified the Father in a manner not to be declar'd: And in such a manner the Father glorified the Son, in exalting him to his right Hand. Which honour hath so affected all Mankind, that they are ungrateful to the highest degree, if they do not readily acknowledge so mighty a kindness, and make not the most grateful Returns they are capable of. Wherefore so great an Addition of Honour accruing to Men over and above what they should have had,

had, if the first Man had not miscarried, they have reason to cry out, O happy Error, which procur'd such, and so great a Redeemer ! And as the holy Angels were affected with Sorrow, for the Fall of the first Man, as for a most sore Calamity befalling their younger Brother, so did they exceedingly rejoyce, for that plenteous Redemption which Christ made. For if there be Joy in Heaven before the Angels, over one Sinner that repenteth, how much rather may we suppose there was very great rejoycing in the presence of the same Angels, when they found that by the Man Christ, a plenary Satisfaction was made to the Justice of God, in behalf of Mankind ; and the Kingdom of Heaven open'd to Believers by the Key of the Cross ? Nor may we suspect that the holy Angels took it ill, that God advanc'd the Man Christ to an Eminency above theirs ; for those blessed Spirits have nothing to do with Envy or Malevolence, but always burn with hearty and sincere Love : and Charity envieth not, is not puffed up, is not afflicted for another's good, but joys and rejoyces together with all good Men, for any Benefit befalls them, as much as if it were their own.

But the Devil, who for a time insultingly triumph'd, for having vanquish'd and overthrown the first Man, felt much greater Sorrow from the Victory of the Man Christ, than was his own former triumphant Joy. For thus much is atchiev'd by Christ's being victorious, that now, not only Men, such as *Adam* was, but even Women and Children insult the Devil, and triumph over him. It had been

been no Shame to the Devil to be overcome by *Adam* in Paradise, when he was free both from Ignorance and Infirmary, and was armed with Original Righteousness, which made the inferior part so subject to Reason, that it could make no Resistance, unless the Mind it self were first rebellious to God. But now for the Devil to be worsted by a mortal Man, that is but a Pilgrim and Foreigner, obnoxious to Ignorance and Concupiscence, is a very great Disgrace: and yet he is overcome by the Grace of Christ, and so overcome that many erect Trophies of Chastity, Patience, Humility, Charity, tho' the Devil constantly assaults them with his fiery Darts of Temptations and Persecutions. And in this the height of Divine Wisdom calls for the greatest admiration. For God saw it necessary for Mankind, in order to escape the Plots of the Devil, to beget in them a Contempt of temporal Goods, of the Pleasures of the Flesh; the Superfluity of Riches, the Glory of this World, and the like Snares, which drown such as are led captive, in Destruction and Perdition. What contrivance had he, that these things should become distastful; and that the contrary, that is, Chastity, Poverty, Humility, Patience, and Contempt of the World, should be pleasant and delightful? It was this; He himself came down from Heaven, and by taking upon him the Form of a Servant, render'd a very bitter and dreadful Remedy, (but necessary to distemper'd Man,) so pleasant and agreeable, that now many Men are more in love with Fasting, than Riotous eating; better pleas'd with Poverty than with Riches;

Riches; fonder of Virginity than Marriage; more desirous of Martyrdom than of Pleasures; choosing rather to obey than bear Rule; to be despis'd than honour'd; to be govern'd than have others at their Beck; to be humbled than exalted. For who seeing God in the likeness of Man, full of Wisdom and Grace, who is incapable of being either impos'd upon, or imposing upon others; who I say, that sees this blessed and glorious Person, poor, humble, patient, continent, and which is more admirable, nail'd to a Cross for the Redemption of Mankind, and dying, (after he had voluntarily shed his Blood) out of most ardent Charity, is not encourag'd and provok'd to Imitation?

This was the high and wonderful Contrivance of Divine Wisdom, which *Esaïas* alludes to when he saith, *Make known thy ways amongst the people.* But yet even to this Day, this Wisdom of God which extends to such an height, appears to be Foolishness, not only to the wise in this World, as the Apostle saith in his former Epistle to the *Corinthians*, but also to carnal and sensual Men, who believe in Christ, but refuse to tread in his Steps, whom the same Apostle calls Enemies of the Cross of Christ. But do thou, my Soul, endeavour to suck Honey from a Flint, and Oyl from the hardest Rock, that is, Wisdom from Folly, the Wisdom of God from the Foolishness of the Cross. Consider seriously and attentively who he is that hangs upon the Cross, and why he is lifted up thither: and when thou hast found, that it is the very same that sits above the Cherubim,

Gal. 2.

bim, nay, that sits at the right hand of Majesty on high; thou wilt easily understand, that he hangs not there for his own Offences, nor on the account of his own Impotency, or others Power; but voluntarily, out of a most earnest Desire of satisfying the Divine Justice for the Sins of the whole World; for the Honour and Glory of God the Father, for the eternal Salvation of all the Elect, and as the Apostle saith, *that he might present to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle*: and lastly, out of his love to thee, because he had a Kindness for thee, and gave himself for thee, an Offering and Oblation to God, for a sweet smelling Savour. When, I say, thou shalt have made this Discovery, let thy Love be inflam'd towards so great a Benefactor, and in Imitation of him, begin to thirst heartily after the Glory of God, the Salvation of all Nations, but especially after the Beauty and Glory of the Universal Church, and thine own Salvation. Begin to long for a perfect Abhorrence of Sin, for Purity of Heart, for Perfection of Righteousness; that thou mayest in time advance a Step higher, and long for a Participation of the Cross of thy Lord, and mayest glory in Tribulation, and Distress; that afterwards thou mayest, with the Righteous, be partaker of the Resurrection unto Glory, and not unto Punishment with the Wicked.

C H A P IV.

TH E Depth of Practical Wisdom remains, which consists in Providence, and Predestination, and the Judgments of God. For thus it is written, *Thy Judgments are a great deep.* And from hence in the first place, it may be inferr'd, that the Providence of God is altogether wonderful, because it immediately governs all things that are created, and directs them to their proper Ends. *His care,* saith the Wise Man, *is equally concerned for all things :* that is, there is not so much as one thing in the Universe which God takes not care of, insomuch that a Sparrow falls not to the Earth, without the Providence of God, as our Saviour affirms. He that can count the Multitude of things which are in the Universe, the same may in some measure guess at the greatness of Divine Wisdom, which governs and directs not only things in general, but every thing in particular. One Emperor indeed may govern the whole World by a general, but not such a particular Providence, as can extend it self to each of his subjects, and therefore must call in to Assistance, a great many Deputies and Viceroyes. But God taketh care of every one, as of all, and of all, as of every one. *A sparrow is not forgot of God, and all the hairs of our head are numbred,* and not so much as one of them shall be lost, because his Providence continually watcheth over us. The young Ravens when

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Gal. 2.

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forfaken of their Parents, are not forfaken of God. How fe curely then mayft thou reft, my Soul, in the Boſom of ſuch a Father, tho' plac'd in the Horror of Darkneſs? amidſt the Mouths of Lions and Dragons? tho' encompaſs'd with innumerable Legions of infernal Spirits? Only adhere to him with ſincere Love, with holy Fear, with ſteady Hope, and full Truſt and Affiance. Nor doth the Providence of God only ſuperintend, and take care of every individual thing, and the things that are preſent, *but alſo reacheth from end to end ſtrongly, and diſpoſeth all things ſweetly.* For God is therefore call'd the King of Ages, becauſe he himſelf hath appointed the Order of Ages, the Succeſſions of Kingdoms, the Viciffitudes and Changes of Times from Eternity. Nothing new, nothing unforeſeen, nothing unexpected can befall God. *The thoughts, indeed, of men, as the Wiſe Man ſaith, are full of anxiety, and the iſſues of our Providence uncertain,* becauſe we can make but erroneous Gueſſes about Futurities. But God as certainly knows what ſhall be, as what is paſt, or preſent, and before the Foundation of the World, diſpos'd the Succeſſions, and Orders of all things in his Mind. But becauſe the way of Divine Providence is very intricate, and his Judgments a great deep, thence it comes to paſs, that ſome Men ſeeing many Evils committed, and the ſame paſs'd over with Impunity, ruſh upon that Precipice of believing that Human Affairs are not managed by Divine Providence, at leaſt, that all Evils are committed by God's Approbation, both which Conceits are impious, but eſpecially

cially the last, as *St. Augustin* discourses. But what misleads Men into the Precipices of Errors, is their seeing one part of Divine Providence, and their not discerning another part; and whereas they ought to wait for the Issue of things, which will be manifest to all at the last Judgment, they adventure rashly to pass Judgment before the time, and so fall into pernicious Errors. Therefore the Apostle cries out in his former Epistle to the Corinthians, *Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart.* *St. Augustin* illustrates this point by a notable Similitude; "Should any one, saith he, come where there is a compleat piece of Embroidery, and could see only one part of the Checkery, he would certainly condemn the Contriver, as ignorant of the Laws of Order, and Composition; he would condemn him because he sees only a small part of the Work, whilst the geatest part is conceal'd from him; but if he saw the whole Design, and the Connexion of the parts one with another, would, doubtless, extol both the Work, and the Author of it. Even so, a great many who see the Prosperity of the Wicked, and the Miseries and Oppressions of the Righteous, and being ignorant what God has in reserve, either for the Wickedness of the Ungodly, or for the Patience of the Righteous, break forth into blasphemous Words, or say with them in *Job*, *Thick clouds are a covering to him that he seeth not, and he walketh in the circuit of Heaven*; or with those in *Malachy*, who say,

1 Cor. 4.

Mal. 2. *Every one that doth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and with such is his delight.* Another Similitude St. *Augustin* frequently made use of, taken from Poetry. "For if any one that
 "has heard but the beginning of an Heroick
 "Verse, should condemn the whole, he could
 "not escape the imputation of Folly : he
 "should suspend his Judgment till the whole
 "had come to his Ears, and then criticise up-
 "on what he dislik'd. So do they act very im-
 prudently, who dare discommend the most
 regular Providence of God, before the whole
 Scheme of it comes in view.

Therefore, my Soul, prevent as much as
 in thee lies, the Commission of Evil, for so God
 commands thee : but why he himself permits
 Evil, leave to his Judgment, which may be
 reserv'd and secret, but cannot be unjust.

C H A P. V.

BUT tho' the way of Divine Providence
 in the Administration of Human Affairs,
 is a great Abyfs ; yet the way of Eternal Pre-
 destination and Reprobation is incomparably
 a greater depth. For why God should lade
 many evil Men with the good things of this
 World, and inflict no Punishment on their
 Sins in this Life ; and on the contrary, why
 he permits many innocent Persons to be pinch-
 ed with Poverty, to be unjustly molested,
 why he suffers the unrighteous to inflict Pu-
 nishments on them, and at last to sacrifice their
 Lives, cannot in every particular be account-
 ed

ed for by us, yet in general we can assign some probable Reason. For God many times suffers the Wicked to thrive and prosper, to reward some of their good Works of Morality, which are not to have any share in the Felicity of Heaven : or to invite them by temporary Kindnesses, to turn from their Sins, and to bring them to the hope and desire of such Kindnesses as last for ever : but he doth not always punish their Sins in this Life, because there is sufficient Punishment reserv'd for them in Hell : but the Righteous he suffers to be in want, to suffer Disgrace, and various Afflictions, both to do away their smaller Offences, and likewise that he may crown their Patience, Humility, and good Works, with greater Glory and Splendor in another State. But why God loved *Jacob*, and hated *Esau*, before they had done any Good or Evil, who can so narrowly search as to find ? And this is what the Apostle admires in his Epistle to the *Romans*. For they were twin-Brothers, Rom. 9. Sons of the same Father, and Mother, and yet God lov'd one by Predestination, and hated the other by Réprobation. And lest some should say, God foresaw the good Works of the one, and the evil Works of the other ; the Apostle prevents this Objection, affirming that this was done, that the Purpose of God according to Election might stand ; and alledgeth the Words of God unto *Moses*, I Exod. 3. *will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.* And who can forbear wondring, that one Person should persevere a long time

Ob.

Sol.

time in good works, and at the end of his life, fall away and perish, as *Judas* the Traitor? Or that another, who had run a long Course in Sin and Vanity, should be converted at the end of his life, and instantly go to Paradise, as the Penitent Thief? You will be apt to reply, *Judas* betray'd Christ, and the Thief made confession of him. True indeed, but could not Christ have look'd upon *Judas*, as he look'd upon *Peter*? Could he not have inspir'd such efficacious Grace into *Judas*, as the most obdurate heart cannot hold out against? And could not Christ have given to both the Thieves Faith and Repentance, while they were hanging with him on the Cross, as well as he gave to one; or have permitted both to die in their Sins, as he permitted one? And who can account, why God should take away some, lest Malice should change their Understanding, as the wise-Man speaks of *Enoch*, and leave a great many to themselves, and permit them to become evil of good, and to carry their Malice with them to the Grave? And what shall we say of whole Nations, whereof some very early, others very late, were called to Faith, without which none can be saved? *For he that believeth not, is condemned already; and, as the Apostle saith,*

Rom. 10. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved. How then shall they call on whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe on whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they are sent?

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These are very high and profound Secrets, which the Father hath conceal'd in the Abyſs of his own Wiſdom, which the Apoſtle doth not explain but wonder at, when he ſaith; *O the height of the riches both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God, how unſearchable are his judgments, and his ways paſt finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counſeller?* This only we may aſſure our ſelves, that there is no Unrighteouſneſs with God: And that at the laſt day there will not be ſo much as one Perſon that cannot truly ſay, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and true are thy judgments.* Beſides, this Uncertainty how God will finally deal with us, tends to the Benefit of us all. For hence it comes to paſs, that neither the Wicked need deſpair of Salvation, and that the Righteous will find reaſon not to preſume of certain Salvation: From this Conſideration Good Men will not give over the Wicked for loſt, but pray for all, and ſolicitouſly concern themſelves for the Salvation of all. From hence even the moſt Virtuous and Pious are reſtrain'd from being Inſolent, and Aſſuming, as being ignorant, what a day may bring forth: And all are warned to work out their Salvation with fear and trembling.

And now, my Soul, having conſider'd all theſe things, let it be thy great buſineſs, to *make thy calling and election ſure, by good works,* as the Apoſtle Peter exhorts thee in his ſecond Epiſtle. But what thoſe good Works are, which make our Calling and Election ſure, the Apoſtle John teaches us, when he ſaith, *My little children, let us not love in word, nor in*

tongue, but in deed, and in truth. For Charity is a thing with which no Man is condemned, without which no Man is saved. But Charity manifests it self by Works, that is, in bestowing an Alms on the Poor, or forgiving Enemies the Wrongs they have done us, not from hope of Retribution in this World, or out of fondness to any Creature, but from a true Principle of sincere love to God, and our Neighbour. And because it is not enough to begin, but *he that perseveres unto the end, the same shall be saved*; therefore the Apostle saith, *Strive to make your calling and election sure*, that is, Mind the business of Salvation, with all imaginable Care and Solitude. And indeed if there is any probable Argument of Divine Election, it is, when the business of Salvation is uppermost in a Man's thoughts, and he prays without ceasing to God for the Gift of true Repentance, and true Humility, and perfect Charity and Perseverance unto the end: And not content only with Prayer, he strives to the extent of his Ability, to seek, and to find the Kingdom of God and the Righteousness thereof, according to our Saviours Admonition.

T H E

Fourteenth Step.

From the Consideration of God's Mercy.

C H A P. I.

TH E Holy Spirit in sacred Writ, so wonderfully extolls the Mercy of God, as to magnifie it above all his Works. For thus saith the sweet singer, *The Lord is good to all, Ps. 145. and his mercies are over all his works.* We shall without Difficulty discover the greatness of this Divine Attribute, if we heedfully attend to the breadth, length, height, and depth thereof. The breadth of Divine Mercy consists in this, that God, and none but God, is able to take away all Miseries, and that he doth take some from all things; and this, purely out of love and kindness to his Creatures, not from any benefit which from thence flows to himself. Created things indeed can take away some miseries, as Bread takes away hunger, Drink thirst, Clothing nakedness, Knowledge ignorance, and the like; but notwithstanding all created Aids and Assistance, some miseries will still cleave unto us.

us. Besides, there are some miseries, which are so much the more grievous, by how much the more occult, and less obvious to our view, to which God only can apply a Remedy. Such are the snares of Devils, who are formidable for number, dangerous for their very great cunning, and by no means to be slighted upon the account of power, and (which mightily aggravates all this,) very ill-affected towards Mankind. Such likewise are the mistakes and blindnesses of an Erroneous Mind and Conscience, which we our selves apprehend not to be in our selves, insomuch that many times we fancy all to be well within, when we are sorely out of order, and dangerously, yea, desperately sick. Who can deliver us from such miseries, but only an Omnipotent Physician? And because many times, when we know nothing of it, God in great pity rescues us from such miseries, all Men may justly be charged with Ingratitude towards God, as our Lord himself attests, when he saith, *Your Heavenly Father is kind, both towards the unthankful and evil.* For it is but a very small and inconsiderable part of God's kindnesses, that fall under our Cognizance, and for what doth so, we express not our gratitude with that humility and devotion that we ought. But farther, created things are so far from taking away all Miseries, that they take away but very few, and those few they take not away from all, but from a few, God reserving to himself the power of taking away all afflictions from all: And though he takes not away all from all, yet there is no Man but

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partakes of some Divine Favour. Well therefore saith the Prophet, *The earth is full of the mercy of the Lord.* The Church in her Prayers saith, *O God whose property it is to have mercy:* Because it belongs to him to take away misery, who is without misery himself; and appertains to him, and him alone, to take away all misery from all Persons, who only is free from all manner of misery. But who is completely free from all misery, save God alone, who is a pure Act, the Supreme Good, and of whose Essence is Beatitude? O my Soul, could thy thoughts comprehend what manner of life that of thy Lord, and Father is, a life elevated above all misery, a life of pure and unmix'd Felicity, how impatient would'st thou be, till thou hadst shelter'd thy self under his Wing, that it might likewise be said of thee, *No evil shall beside thee, nor any plague come nigh thy dwelling?* But you will say, if God can take away all miseries from all things, why doth he not so, when as he is the Father of Mercies, that is, a most merciful and compassionate Father? How comes it about that afflictions are so very rife amongst Mankind, under the Government of the Father of Mercies? And why is it said, *The earth is full of the mercy of the Lord;* and not rather, on the contrary, the Earth is replenish'd with all kinds of misery? God can indeed totally exempt Man from all kinds of misery, but he only takes away such as his Wisdom judges fit to be remov'd. But the Divine Wisdom doth not judge it expedient for them, that all afflictions should be remov'd, and many times judges it mercy to

Obj.

Sol.

to continue them, that room may be made for greater mercy. The Apostle intreated the Lord thrice, that the Thorn in the Flesh might be taken from him, and he was not heard, because power is perfected in weakness. God took not from *Lazarus* the misery of poverty and sores, that he might be convey'd with greater mercy, by Angels, into *Abraham's Bosom*. And how would rich Men have such opportunities of improving their talents of Wealth, were there not such as are hungry and thirsty, naked and sick, strangers and prisoners, that cannot help themselves? And if there were no Temptations, nor Encounters with Infernal Spirits, where would there be any Triumphs, and Crowns of Virgins and Confessors? And were there no Labours, nor Sorrows, where would be the Crown of Patience? And were there no Persecutors, where would be the Palm of Martyrdom? Therefore in this our state of Exile, it may be truly affirm'd, both that the Earth is full of Miseries, because our very Sins consider'd apart, are very great miseries; and also that the Earth is full of the Mercy of the Lord, because the Conversion of Sinners, the good Examples of Holy Men, and other-innumerable kindneses of God, both temporal and spiritual, what are they but continual, and very great Mercies from God our Creator? Let us therefore give thanks to our gracious God, because as our Tribulations abound, while we are travelling thro' this vale of Misery, so our Consolation aboundeth through his mercy. *O God, saith David, thy mercies are in Heaven: For in Hea-*

ven will be pure Mercy without any mixture or allay of Misery ; Mercy fills that place, and leaves not the least room for Misery.

C H A P. II.

NOW the length of Divine Mercy is his forbearance or patience, which the Scriptures usually conjoyn with Mercy, as an Appendix, or Species thereof. For thus saith David, *the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy: And in another Psalm much to the same purpose, The Lord is full of mercy and pity, forbearing, and very merciful.* The long-suffering and patience of God our most merciful Father towards Mankind, is admirable indeed, far surpassing that of Masters towards their Servants, nay, that of Parents towards their Children, though both are Men, and sprung from the same Original. And first, God is long-suffering towards Offenders, waiting for their Amendment with incredible patience ; sometimes bearing from the Spring of their Youth, to the Winter of old Age, the violation of his Laws, and the rending of his Name in pieces ; and all this while, *Showing down his blessings upon them from Heaven, giving them rain and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness,* as the Apostle writes. And what Master, or Parent, is there amongst Men, so meek and gentle, who, seeing himself Contemn'd and Affronted days without number,

number, by a Son or Servant, would not at last discard them? But the Mercifulness of God is not overcome by the malice of Men, but he still exercises Patience, *not willing that any should Perish, but that all should come to Repentance*, as St. Peter affirms in his second Epistle. And the wise Man says, *Thy compassion, O Lord, falls upon all Men, and thou winkest at mens faults in expectation of their repentance.* But his patience is yet more visible in this, that whereas many Sinners by the grace of God, being drawn out of the puddle of Sin, and the mire of Pollution; and from being the children of Darkness, made the children of Light; and call'd from a state of Damnation, to the Adoption of the children of God, and to an hope of the Kingdom of Heaven; relapse again, and again, many times and often, to their former filthiness and ingratitude, yet are not forsaken by God's patience and forbearance, but most lovingly waited for, and invited to Reformation and Amendment; and if they do heartily repent, they are received again, and with the Prodigal in the Gospel, affectionately imbrac'd, and restor'd to their former Honours and Dignities. It was with good reason, that when St. Peter inquir'd how oft he was oblig'd to forgive his Brother that sinned against him, whether seven times? Our Lord answer'd, *I say not unto thee, untill Seven times, but until Seventy times seven.* For he would have us to imitate himself, in granting Pardon to Penitents. But he hath set no bounds to his favour and reconciliation, but such as terminate our lives. As long as the Sinner

2 Pet. 3.

Ch. 3.

Wisd. 11.

Sinner liveth, though he attain to an hundred years and more, all the while Sinning, and Repeating the same sins, yet is he admitted to Pardon by his most indulgent Father. Repentance, so it be serious, and proceed from an heart truly Contrite, and Humble, is never too late for our merciful Father. But from this consideration no Man ought to abuse the Goodness of God, nor put off his Conversion from day to day, since we are all ignorant of the hour or day, when our Souls shall be dislodg'd, and appear at the Tribunal of a most righteous Judge. Nay, by this great and unspeakable goodness of God, all Men should be won to Repentance. For if the Lord be so kind towards Sinners, that so often backslide, how Lovingly, and how like a Father will he treat those who after they have once tasted the Grace of God, can never after be prevail'd upon, by the greatest Importunity of Temptations, to be separated or divorced from it? But there is yet another sort of Divine Forbearance, which calls for the greatest Love and Admiration, which God exercises, in bearing with the offences of the righteous themselves. For God of his infinite kindness, hath made us Friends, from being Enemies, Sons of Servants, Heirs of his Kingdom, from meriting eternal Death: And yet are we Ungrateful to so high a degree, as continually to return him evil for good. For if the Apostle *James* saith, *In many things we offend all*; what acknowledgments of deficiency in Duty ought we to make, who come so far short of Apostolical Perfection? Behold! we are discouraging

coursing with God in Prayer, and are carry-
 ed away by our roving Fancies to muse up-
 on impertinent things, and turn as it were
 our backs upon Him. What Master upon
 Earth, would suffer his Servants who are
 standing in his presence, and talking with
 him, to depart abruptly from him, and go
 chat with their fellows? What shall I say of
 idle Words? of vain Thoughts? of unprof-
 itable Works? of Excess in Meat and Drink?
 in Sleep and Diversions? of remissness about
 holy Things? of omission of fraternal Cor-
 reption? of other Offences without number,
 of which all of us are continually guilty?
 And yet our God is gracious and gentle, and
 of great mercy to all that call upon him.
 He bears with such Rudeness, and Incivility
 (as I may say) and fooleries of his Children,
 as Men cannot bear with from one another.
 This St. *Augustin* takes notice of in Comment-
 ing upon these words of the *Psalmist*, *Thou*
Lord art good and gracious. Where he bewails
 the Infirmary of Men, who cannot refrain
 their thoughts from wandring, even when
 they are presenting their Petitions to God,
 and magnifies the Divine Lenity in bearing
 so many Indignities from his Servants. For
 he knows whereof we are made, and deals
 with us as a Mother doth with her little Child,
 she still feeds and cherishes it, though it lift
 up its hand against her. But though God so
 far bears with his Servants Offences, as not
 to stop the intercourse of Friendship, nor to
 disinherit them, yet will he not dismiss them
 unrevenged at the day of Judgment, where-
 in we must give an account even for idle
 words,

words, unless our Prayers and Tears have help'd to atone for them. Therefore, my Soul, account not these offences slight and trivial, but reckon thy self to have sorely offended, if at any time engag'd in Prayer, thou permittest thy thoughts to go astray, make Confession thereof immediately, and heartily lament and bewail thy Carelessness, by which method thou wilt discourage those flies from obtruding themselves.

C H A P. III.

NOW follows the height of Divine Mercy, which is taken from the Cause which moved God to Mercy, which indeed is very high, and exalted above all the Heavens, according to that of the *Psalmist*, *Thy mercy O Lord is in the Heavens*, and, *Mercy shall be built up for ever in Heaven*. For some Men have pity on others, because they are Serviceable, and that they cannot well be without their Assistance: And this indeed is the very lowest degree of pity, as reaching no higher than our own Profit; for the sake of which we pity our Horses, Dogs, and Cattle. Others have pity on the account of Consanguinity, or Friendship, because they are Sons, or Brethren, Acquaintance or Friends, and this is a Step higher than the other, and is upon the confines of Virtue. Others in the last place, have Compassion, because they are Neighbours, that is, Men like themselves, sprung from the same God, and the same Clay. Therefore they consider

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not, whether they are Friends or Enemies, Virtuous or Vitious, Natives or Foreigners, but have pity upon all whom they know to be created after the image of God: And this is the highest Pitch that Mortals can arrive at. But God hath compassion indeed on all Things, because they are his Creatures; but in a peculiar manner on Men, because they are his Images; and in a more peculiar manner still, on the Righteous, because they are his Sons, Heirs of his Kingdom, and Joynt-Heirs with his only Begotten. But if thou inquirest why God made the World? Why he formed Man in his own Image? Why he justified the Wicked? Why he adopted them for his Sons? Why he appointed them Heirs of his Kingdom? No answer can be return'd, but, that such was his Will and Pleasure: Or why he would have it so but only that he is Good. For Goodness is of a diffusive nature, and readily communicates it self. Therefore mercy is built up in Heaven, and from the highest Habitation that is from the heart of the supreme Father came down upon Earth, and overspread the same, according to that of the Prophet, *The Earth is full of the mercy of the Lord.* As therefore in us God finds matter for punishment so in himself he always finds what prompts him to mercy.

Lift up now, my Soul, the Eyes of thy mind to that highest fountain of Mercy; behold that supreme Purity, that has not the least Allay of any selfish Design. And when thou hearest our great Master in his Exhortations, saying, *Be ye merciful, as your Father*

is merciful ; endeavour to the utmost, not only to pity thy Fellow-Servants, but to pity them with that purity of Affection, wherewith our Heavenly Father pityeth us. If thou forgivest him that detracts from thy Reputation, and blackens it with slanders; forgive heartily, and bury the Offence in eternal Oblivion: For our Father also forgetteth our Offences, as the Prophet *Ezek.* writes; *Ezek. 18.* and removes our Iniquities as far from us, as the East is from the West, according to *David* Pf. 103. *vid.* that is, that they may not be in a capacity of doing us any farther hurt. If thou bestowest an Alms upon a poor Man, do thou reckon thyself to be rather a Receiver than a Giver, because he that hath pity on the poor, lendeth upon Usury unto the Lord: And therefore give with Humility and Reverence, not as an Alms to a poor Man, but as some small Present to a mighty Prince. If thou sustaineest some Inconvenience in order to support thy indigent Neighbour, consider how far short thou comest of thy Lord, who to serve thee, shed his Blood, and dyed upon the Cross. Hence it will come to pass, that thou wilt advance, and make proficiency, in the virtue of Mercy, without expectation of any earthly Reward, or from any vain-glorious Motive, and only from a Principle of sincere love to God, and thy Neighbour.

C H A P. IV.

THERE remains to be consider'd the Depth of Divine Mercy. Now as the Height of that is most conspicuous in the Cause, so the Depth of it is most likely to be discover'd in the Effects. That mercy then which descends no lower than to kind Expressions, is not to be term'd a profound, but a mere superficial Mercy. That Mercy hath a greater Depth, which doth not only ease, and refresh the miserable with words of Consolation, but also with real Benefactions. But that is most profound which not only helps the Miserable by discoursing with them, and conferring their Goods on them; but also by suffering on their account, and by undergoing Labours and Sorrow for them. Now our God, of whose Mercies there is no end, hath express'd his Mercies to us in all these respects. And in the first place, he hath sent to us the Holy Scriptures, as Letters of Consolation; for we may say with the *Maccabees*,

2 Ma. 12. *Having at hand to comfort us the word of God*
Nor doth God only talk to us by Letter, but also by the Discourses of Preachers, who are sent to us as Ambassadors from Christ in this our Pilgrimage, and by internal Inspirations with promises of Aid and Protection.

Pf. 85. *will bear, saith David, what God the Lord will say, for he will speak peace unto his People.* And next, the benefits of God's mercies, against our manifold miseries, both Spiritual, and Temporal

Temporal, are so many that they cannot be numbred. For as the *Psalmist* saith, *He is still crowning us with loving kindness, and tender mercies*, that is, he surrounds us on all sides with the Blessings and Benefits of his Mercies. Thirdly, the Mercy of God by the Mystery of Incarnation Condescends to the suffering of Labours and Sorrows, of Hunger and Thirst, of Disgrace and Reproaches, of Wounds and Bruises, of the Cross and Death, to redeem us from all Iniquitie, and from everlasting Death, which is the due reward of Iniquity. Is there yet any Abyss of greater Depth to which the mercy of God could stoop and descend? There is doubtless. For this he did not from any Obligation, but of mere Grace and Favour; *For he was made* Isa. 53. *an offering for us, because it was his pleasure.* For who could put any Force upon the Son of God, (who thought it no robbery to be equal with the Father,) to deuest himself of Glory, and take upon him the form of a Servant? To become poor for us, that we thro' his poverty, might be made rich? To be humbled unto death, even the death of the Cross, that he might quicken and exalt us? Nothing certainly but love forced him; nothing but pity compell'd him. But we are not yet got to the bottom of this Depth: For in the work of our Salvation, he was pleas'd to communicate the Glory and Honour of it with us. That division which was made by the Angelical Host, seems very suitable, *viz.* Glory to God on High, on Earth Peace: Honour to God, Benefit to Mankind. But such is God's mercy, that he would have all

Mat. 20.

49.

2 Cor. 1.

the Benefit to be ours, the Glory to be partly his, and partly ours. For it was his pleasure to confer Grace upon us, whereby we might co-operate to our own Salvation, and so might be thought worthy of that eternal life, which Christ hath merited for us: Not that Christ's Merit is insufficient, but that he might communicate with us the Praise and Glory of our own Salvation. From hence is that saying in the Gospel, *Give him his hire, or reward*: And the Apostle thus glories, *There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness*. Lastly, the mercy of God towards Mankind is most profound, especially towards pious Men, and such as fear God, because it surpasses the Affection of Fathers and Mothers, than which we know not any greater upon Earth. Hear the Prophet *Esaïas*, *Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should not have Compassion on the son of her womb? she may forget, yet will not I forget thee*. Hear *David*, *As a father pityeth his children, so the Lord pityeth them that fear him*. And lest thou shouldst say, there are Parents in the World, whose love to their Children converts sometimes into hatred; *David* makes this addition to what he had said concerning the mercy of God towards his Children: *The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting, and to everlasting, upon them that fear him*. And that his mercy is of such Duration, the Apostle gives us Assurance when he calls God, *The father of mercies, and the God of all Consolation*. Therefore God is not only a Father to them that fear him, but a most merciful Father, and very inclinable to comfort and support us, for he takes a

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way the miseries of Afflictions and Tribulations from his People, when he sees the Removal thereof expedient for them, and herein approves himself the Father of Mercies : and to enable them patiently to bear those miseries, which he judges expedient for them to be exercis'd with, he supplies them with ineffable consolation, and herein shews himself to be the God of all Consolation. Now the Apostle affirms him to be the God of all Consolation for two reasons. First, because God knows how to comfort his Children in all kinds of Tribulation : Which surely the World cannot do, because many times the Spring and Source of Tribulations is conceal'd from it. Even as *Job's* Friends were miserable Comforters, as he himself tells us, because they knew not the Cause of his Distemper, and so mis-applied the Remedy : Or sometimes the Tribulation is so great, that no human Consolation can be adequate to it. But God who is a most Wise, and most powerful Physician, can make an absolute Cure of all manner of Diseases : And therefore the Apostle saith, *who comforteth us in all our Tribulation.* Secondly, He is called the God of all Consolation, because he can apply comfort in so plentiful a manner, that 'tis more Eligible to suffer Affliction with such strong support, than to have neither the one nor the other. This was experimentally found by *Theodorus* a Youth, and Confessor in the persecution under *Julian* the Apostate, who was so exquisitely tortured for the space of ten hours, (in which time he had wearied several Executioners,)

that no age records such an Act; and yet he was in a pleasant humour all the time, and sung *Dauids* Psalms: And then only gave Indications of displeasure when he was order'd to be taken down, by reason of the great Support he receiv'd from the presence of an Angel, amidst his tortures, as *Ruffinus* informs us. And therefore 'tis no wonder if the Apostle say, *I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding glad in all our Tribulations: And in his first chapter of this Epistle, Who comforts us in all our Tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble.*

2 Cor. 7.

What thinkest thou now, my Soul, of that abundant, durable, pure and unconceivable Mercy of the Lord, who stands not in need of any Good we either have, or can do, and yet out of his abundant kindness, is as much concern'd for his poor Servants, as if all his happiness depended on them? What grateful Returns wilt thou make him? What canst thou ever do to make thy Gratitude keep pace with his Mercy? Endeavour at least so far as in thee lies, to conform thy Actions to his will and pleasure. And because it is written, *Be ye merciful, as your Father is merciful; and, Take pity on thy Soul, and please God; Let thy first business be, carefully to search out the miseries of thy Soul. For indeed the miseries of the body are obvious enough, and we need not put any in Mind to pity them: For if the Body has fasted but a Day, or has had a restless Night, or is in Pain by a fall, or wound, it presently breaks forth into Outcries and Lamentations, and we are careful to apply suitable Remedies. But the Soul*

Luke 6.

Ecclef. 30.

Soul is deny'd her proper Food for weeks together, or languisheth under the Wounds it has receiv'd, or is under a deadly Stupefaction, and no body takes care of it, none lends it an helping hand. Therefore frequently visit thy Soul, and see how it fares: Examine its several Faculties, and consider in what state of health they are, whether they have made any proficiency in knowledge and love of the true Good; or on the contrary, whether they labour not under Ignorance, or languish not under several Lusts; or whether the Understanding is not blinded with Malice, and the will corrupted with the maladies of Pride or Envy. And if thou findest this to be thy case, cry unto the Lord, and say, *Have mercy upon me, for I am weak.* Consult Spiritual Physicians, and apply seasonable Remedies. And then, in the next place, have thou compassion on the Souls of others, whereof an infinite number are in a lost condition though Christ dyed for them. O my Soul, didst thou thoroughly understand the price of Souls, *i. e.* the pretious Blood of the Son of God, and the great slaughter that is made of them by infernal Wolves, and malignant Spirits, roaring like Lions to make a prey of them; thou couldest not, I am sure, but heartily pity them, and endeavour their Rescue by prayer unto God, and all other ways. Lastly, Compassionate the bodily necessities of thy Neighbours, not with thy Tongue, and in Words, but in Deed and in Truth, remembring the saying of thy Lord, *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

T H E Fifteenth Step.

*From Consideration of the greatness of
Divine Justice, by the Similitude of
Corporeal Greatness.*

C H A P. I.

THE Justice of God in Holy Writ has a fourfold Acceptation; first it is taken for universal Justice, which comprehends all Virtues, and is the same thing as Holiness or Righteousness, as in that of the Psalmist, *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* Secondly, it is taken for Truth, or Fidelity, as in the 51st Psalm; *That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings.* Thirdly, for distributive Justice, or that Justice which returns due rewards; as 2 Tim. 4. in the second Epistle to Timothy, *There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which God, the righteous Judge shall render unto me in that day.* Lastly, 'tis taken for vindictive Justice, or that Justice that takes vengeance on Sin, as in that of the Psalmist, *Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible*

rible tempest, this shall be the portion of their cup, because the Lord is righteous, and loveth righteousness. We shall in some measure have a notion of the greatness of Divine Justice, if we consider the breadth of his universal Justice; the length of his justice that consists in Truth and Fidelity; the height of his Justice that distributes rewards in Heaven; and the depth of his justice that inflicts never-ending punishments upon the wicked in Hell. And to begin with breadth; That with us is called Universal Justice, which disposeth a Man to regulate all his actions according to law in each particular, and therefore comprehends all virtues both Divine, and Moral. But there is a certain virtue, which includes all virtues in it self, and has the command over the Acts of all virtues, and which directs them to their ultimate end, and this is Charity. Which although it is but a particular virtue, and one of the Theological, may notwithstanding be termed Universal Justice. For this disposes a Man to a suitable behaviour towards God and his Neighbour, and so is the completion of the whole law. Thus saith the Apostle; *Love worketh no evil*, Rom. 13. *and he that loveth hath fulfilled the law, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* And St. Aug. in his Book of Nature and Grace saith; "Charity begun, is Justice begun; Charity improv'd, is Justice improv'd; great Charity, is great Justice, compleat Charity, is compleat Justice. But farther, there are in God all virtues which presuppose no Imperfection, and in lieu of such as do, there is something far better and more excellent, and

and therefore there is no deficiency of goodness in him, but rather such an infinite and immense degree of that, and Holiness, that, he very justly claims the title of, Only Good, and only Holy. Therefore Faith, that Theological Virtue, is not in God, because that is of things not seen, but God sees all things; nor is there Hope in God, because that is an expectation of things future, but God who possesses all things from Eternity, can have no expectations. There is no repentance for any Omission or Commission, for God can do nothing amiss. There is in him no Humility; because this curbs a Man from vainly ascending above himself, and confines him to his proper place, but God is the most High, and therefore has nothing above himself to aspire to. But there is resident in God, Charity, that Queen of Virtues, in a very ample, yea, in a measure infinite, and unmeasurable. For he infinitely loves Himself, because he alone perfectly knows that infinite good which is his Essence; he also loves all things which he hath made. For thus saith the wise Man,

Wis. 11. *Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of those things which thou hast made.* For God by his wisdom understands how to separate evil from good, *i. e.* a Defect, from Nature, even in Devils, and the very worst of Men; and he loveth Nature which he made, but hates the defect which he made not. Lastly, this virtue is so truly and really in God, that he is pleas'd to be call'd by that name, according to St. John, *God is love.* But our Love compar'd with the Divine, is very strait and narrow. For there are abundance of things

1 Ep. 4.

things which we therefore love not, because we know them not : And many things which do fall within our knowledge, have no share of our Love, for want of skill to distinguish the good that is in them from the Evil. And there are a great many things confessedly good, which we love not as we ought to do, and therefore not with true love, because we our selves are evil, and actuated rather by our Lusts and Appetites, than by Love and Charity. Our love to God is imperfect, not only as being inferior to the merits of his goodness, of which that of Angels themselves falls short ; but also because we love him less than we ought, and less indeed than we are capable, did we give up our selves more constantly and vigilantly to Prayer and Contemplation. And there attend upon this Queen of Virtues in the Lord, a most noble Retinue of other Virtues, as, most magnificent Liberality ; inexpressible Favour and Condescension ; unheard of Patience and Forbearance ; a more than Fatherly Affection, and Endearingness ; never failing Truth and Fidelity ; Mercy that fills Heaven and Earth ; most exact and inflexible Justice, and Lastly, Holiness so very bright and pure, that the Stars are not clean in his sight, and the Seraphim amaz'd and astonish'd cry out, *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts !* O my Soul, didst thou attentively consider these things, with what fear and trembling wouldst thou stand before God, when thou offerest thy Prayers, and thy Praises to him ? But especially, thou would'st approach to the Holy Altar with the profoundest Reverence and

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Humility, and there in the presence of the blessed Angels, receive the most comfortable Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, and thankfully commemorate the infinite kindness and condescension of God, in offering up his only begotten Son for the Salvation of Mankind.

CHAP. II.

BUT let us proceed to the rest. The length of Divine Justice discovers it self in Truth and Fidelity. *The Lord*, saith the Prophet, *is faithful in all his sayings*; that is, the promises of the Lord which many ages since were pronounc'd by the Prophets, have at no time yet fail'd, nor shall fail at any time hereafter, they are more firm and steadfast than Heaven and Earth. For thus saith the

Luke 16. Lord, *It is easier for Heaven and Earth to pass away, than one tittle of the law to fail.* Where, by Law, our Lord understands not only the Truth of his Commands, but likewise of all his promises. For our Lord's Commands must either be fulfilled, or the violation of them be punish'd: And his Promises are founded upon a sure and everlasting Basis. On which

Mat. 5. account also our Lord saith, *Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*: And *Esaias*, *The word of the Lord endureth for ever*: And *David*, *His commandments are faithful, and stand fast for ever, and ever.* And the Apostle, *Let God be true, and every man a liar*: And again, *It is impossible for God*

Isa. 40.
Ps. 111.

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to lie; the reason of which is, because he can neither be deceived, because he is Wisdom; nor deceive, because he is Goodness; nor fail, because he is Omnipotency. But Men, although they are wise, and good, and powerful, yet are capable both of deceiving, and of being deceived; because their knowledge extends not to all things, nor have they power to accomplish all their pleasure: And even those, who when they engage their word, do really purpose to make it good, may afterwards change their minds, and have no regard to their Promises. Wherefore, my Soul, if thou art wise, put thy whole trust in God, keep close to him alone, and cast all thy care upon him. Walk circumspectly with the Lord thy God, and he will be watchful for thy safety. Take especial care of sinning against his Justice, and his Mercy shall always defend thee, so that thou shalt not fear what either Man or Devil can do unto thee.

C H A P. III.

NOW the Height of Divine Justice is seen in the Retribution of that Heavenly Reward, which God the Supream, and most righteous Judge, hath prepar'd for them who live Godly and Righteous Lives. And, first, we shall be able to take a right Estimate of the Magnitude of this Justice, if we make a Comparison betwixt God the supreme Judge, and Men that are subordinate Judges:

es : And, Secondly, if we shall weigh the reward of one, against that of the other, that is, the Recompence which God will give, with that which Men usually return. Humane Judges both Civil and Ecclesiastick, very rarely give a just reward to such of their Subjects and Servants, as they are indebted to, and this for many Reasons. For perhaps their Ability extends not so far as to reward every Man's Merit : Or it may be the Merits of their Dependents are not within the Sphere of their Knowledge, at least they cannot make an exact, and just Estimate thereof, as depending on the Sincerity, and Devotedness of their Mind : Or it may be, their own Injustice, Avarice, or some other perverse Affections, will not permit them to make a due retaliation to their faithful services : Or, lastly, it may happen either by deaths seizing them before they have made due acknowledgments and returns ; or by summoning the other, to whom Rewards are owing, before they can enjoy the fruits of their Labours. But to convince us that no service which is done by the Righteous, shall fail of reward, we are told that so mean a service as the giving a Cup of cold Water to the thirsty, shall not be forgotten. And St. Luke speaks of a bountiful reward promis'd by our Lord, *Good measure, and press'd down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.* Nor is there danger, lest the righteous should go unrewarded from want of Ability in God, because he is Lord and Proprietor of all things, and can with a bare word, infinitely increase and multiply all things.

Luke 6.

things. Nor need we fear lest he should be mistaken in judging either of the Quantity or Quality of our Services, because he is most Wise, *and all things are open and bare to his eyes*, and he himself searches the Hearts and Reins of his Servants that engage in his Service, and therefore thoroughly understands with what Mind and Intention, with what Zeal and Industry, they have all along acted. Nor can we be suspicious of any unkind design in God, of defrauding his poor Servants, and Children of a just reward, because he is faithful in all his sayings. Nor lastly, is he capable of dying, because Immortality most properly is his, and all things live unto him: so that there is no danger lest we should fail of just Rewards, through the death of him that should confer them. Let us therefore stedfastly resolve, that all the good works which any righteous Man doth, shall receive a just reward from God the righteous Judge: That, consequently 'tis the safest course to be employ'd in his Service, because he's a just Pay-master; and that 'tis a dangerous and foolish thing to put confidence in Men, and from them to expect a just Recompence of our pains.

Let us now compare both Rewards; the Rewards of God, with the Rewards of Men; those above in Heaven, with these below in Earth. What recompence, I beseech you, can poor Mortals render those who toil for them all Day long, that pass the Night without sleep, and hazzard their lives in Battels? O the blindness of Mankind! What expectation can we have from them, but of
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things that are abject, mean, and perishable? But from God we may infallibly look for such things as will both Enrich and Ennoble us, and stay with us to Eternity: And yet, alafs! the other are courted, these slighted and contemn'd. *St. Chrysostom* in his Comment on *St. Mat.* compares the Palaces, Cities, and Kingdoms of this World, which so raise Mens Admiration, to those Fabricks, which Children make of Chalk and Clay; which little Hutts, and trifling Edifices, cost the poor Children a great deal of pains, but seem very Ridiculous to those that are past the time of Childhood. And it frequently happens, that when the Father or Master of these Children observe them to be so taken up with such Trifles, as to neglect their Books; he kicks all down, and overturns with the greatest ease in one moment, that which cost them a great deal of time and thought to build up. Even so, stately Palaces, monumental Towers, Castles, fortifi'd Towns, and Kingdoms of Men, are no more than poor Cottages of dirt, if compar'd with those Goods, which are eternal in the Heavens; and are beheld with derision from Heaven, by the blessed Angels, and are many times levell'd with the ground, by a frown only from our Heavenly Father; to inform us, what mere Vanities, and Illusions all sublunary things are. Which, though now adays, few take notice of, yet a time will come, that is, the last Judgment, when all shall take notice, though it be then too late and insignificant. *The day of Judgment*, saith *St. Hilary*, will plainly reveal to us, the Emptiness, Vanity, and Nothing-

Nothingness of all things below. But let us a little more accurately declare what those Heavenly Rewards are, which in these Irreligious and Atheistical times are generally nothing valued in comparison of the Trifles of this World. In the first place there will be good things in great abundance in the Kingdom of Heaven, or rather there will be all things that can be desir'd : For all the Inhabitants of that City shall be blessed. Now what is Beatitude, but a complete Collection, or meeting together of all good things ? There must therefore be the Goods of the Mind, Wisdom, and all the Virtues ; the Goods of the Body, as Beauty, Health, and Vigour ; external Goods, Wealth, Pleasure, Glory. Then secondly, all these things shall be superlatively great, and in the highest degree of Perfection and Eminency. For God who manifested his power in the Creation of the World out of nothing, his Wisdom in Government and Providence, and his Love and Goodness, in the Redemption of Mankind, by the mysterious Incarnation and Passion of his Son, will then display the magnificence of his Glory, and the bountifulness of his Liberality, in distributing Rewards, Palms, and Crowns to those, who shall triumph over their Enemy the Devil. And this wisdom shall be, not only a view of Divinity in the glass of the Creatures, but the very, and true Vision of the Essence of God, that Cause of all Causes ; and of the very prime and superream Truth : From which most Glorious Vision, the Souls of Saints shall shine with such lustre and radianey, that St. John saith of

that future Glory, *We shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* From this exalted Wisdom shall proceed that Queen of all Virtues, Charity: Charity so fervent, that always adhering close to the Supream Good, it neither will nor can be divorc'd from it. So the Soul, and all its faculties shall be immoveably settled in a state of compleat Happiness: The Body shall shine like the Sun, as our Lord himself attests, when he saith, *Then the righteous shall shine as the Sun, in the kingdom of their father.* Such will their Beauty be. Their health will be Immortality; their strength Impassibility: And lastly, the Body, which now is Animal, will then be Spiritual, *i. e.* it will be so perfectly obedient to the Spirit, that when commanded, it shall move more nimbly than the Winds, and by its subtilty pass through Walls. And then its Riches will be, not only to want nothing, but with God, and in God, to possess all things. *For he will make them Rulers over all his Goods, Mat. 24.* What shall I say concerning Pleasure, when as it is written, *They shall be abundantly satisfied with the plenty of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures?* What mind is able to conceive the greatness of that delight, which the fruition of the supream Good imports? To behold beauty it self? To tast sweetness it self? To enter into the joy of the Lord, that is, to participate of that felicity, which renders God himself happy? The Honour and Glory of Saints surpasses all Eloquence, for upon the Stage of the Universe, Men and Angels being Spectators, every Saint shall have the

the honour of Divine Applause, and be presented with a victorious Crown; and, (which is the highest honour they are capable of,) they shall be seated on Christ's Throne, as Co-partners of his Kingdom: For thus we read in the Revelations, *He that overcometh, to him will I give to sit with me on my throne, as I also have overcome, and do sit with my father in his throne.* Rev. 3. This noble pitch of Honour the Prophet admir'd, when he acknowledg'd that it was too wonderful for him. Now if to this multitude and excellency of good things, we superadd Eternity, which wonderfully heightens their Value, who shall be able to conceive the greatness of Celestial Felicity? And yet we shall experience by possessing, what we are not able to comprehend by thinking, if by leading a Pious, Righteous, and Sober Life, we shall be admitted to those blessed Regions. For the good things of that place, which through the assistance of Divine Grace, are procur'd with momentary pains, shall endure to all Eternity.

Eternity

What, my Soul, hast thou to say to all this? Hast thou a mind to pursue childish Diversions in erecting little Houses of Clay, and to unqualifie thy self for the inheritance of that Kingdom that shall never have an end? Wilt thou be content, (which I cannot without horror think of) to delight in brutish pleasures, who art invited to Angelical Entertainments, and Joys that cannot be express'd? Let thy Mercy, blessed Lord, avert this from the Soul of thy Servant, but rather strike terror into my Flesh, and let obedience to thy Laws become sweeter to me than Honey,

and the Honey-comb, that by crucifying the Flesh with the Affections and Lusts, I may boldly aspire to those spiritual, and everlasting delights of thy Paradise. Grant to thy Servant, O Lord, to follow the steps of thy Christ, who being meek and lowly in Heart, *When he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatned not.* Grant me to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this World, that with some Assurance, I may look for that blessed hope, and the Glorious Appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

C H A P. IV.

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IT remains that we consider that justice which God exerciseth in punishing Sinners in the Abyss of Hell, by doing which with-seriousness and advertency, we shall find that to be very true indeed, which the Apostle affirms in his Epistle to the *Hebrews*, It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. For, (to follow the order which we have observ'd in that Justice, which rewards the services of Holy Men) God, the righteous Judge will not dismiss the Smallest Sins unpunished, such as idle words; for thus we read in the Gospel, *Every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give an account of in the day of Judgment.* There are many Crimes indeed, which here escape punishment, sometimes for want of power to inflict it, the Criminals being either too mighty, or too nimble for Justice: Or because Men are ignorant

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rant of what is done, or the Offences are not attested by legal Evidence, or because the Judges have no mind to punish, being either corrupted by Bribes, or work'd upon by Kindness, or deprav'd by their own Malice. But God is omnipotent, and therefore there is no resisting his Power. He is likewise in all places, and therefore there is no concealing our selves from him. *Whither shall* Psal. 139.

I go, saith David, from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I climb up into Heaven, thou art there, if I go down into Hell, thou art there also. He is likewise most wise, and knoweth all things, even such as lie in the darkest corners, and most private recesses of the Heart, nor needs he evidence to prove the Crimes, when as the Consciences of Men serve the Lord for a thousand Witnesses. And then in the last place, no Gifts, nor Favours can corrupt the Justice of God, because no addition can be made to his Happiness by any thing we have. Conclude we therefore, that there is not any Sin from the greatest to the least, from the most Heinous, to the most Venial, that can escape God's vindictive Justice, unless it be done away by Repentance. For by how much the more abundant God's Mercy now is in pardoning, the more rigorous and severe will his Justice hereafter be in taking vengeance. Of this time *Esaias* saith, *In a season acceptable* II. 45. *have I heard thee, and in the day of salvation have I succour'd thee.* Which the Apostle explaining in his later Epistle to the Corinthians, saith, *Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold* 2 Cor. 6. *now is the day of salvation.* And the Prophet

: Chap.

Zeph. cries out of the time succeeding this life, *That day is a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of Calamity, and misery, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of rain, and of a mighty wind, a day of the trumpet and of the alarm:* Nor shall all Sins only be punish'd, but shall be punish'd with such dreadful Torments, as can hardly now enter into any Man's thoughts. For as the Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have enter'd into the Heart of Man the things which God hath prepar'd for them that Love him; so neither hath the Eye seen, nor the Ear heard, nor the Heart conceiv'd what God hath prepar'd for them that Hate him. For the miseries of Sinners in Hell will be very many, very severe, without any alloy, or intermixture of consolation; and which infinitely heightens the misery, they will be everlasting, and without end. First, they will be very many, because every faculty of the Soul, and all the senses of the Body shall have their proper Tormentors. Consider and weigh the words of that Sentence, which the supreme Judge shall pronounce at the last day: *Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire.* "Depart, that is, away with you from the society of the Blessed, being depriv'd for ever of the vision of God, which is the highest and Essential Happiness, and the ultimate End for which ye were created." *Ye cursed*, that is, do not for the future expect any kind of Blessing, for ye shall be deprived of all the Influence of Grace, of all Hope of Salvation; no more shall the Waters of Wisdom rain down upon you, nor the Dew of Holy Inspiration

Mat. 15.

Inspiration descend into your Hearts: No more
 shall the Rays of Heavenly light shine upon
 you: No more shall the Grace of Repen-
 tance, nor the Blossom of Charity, nor the
 Fruits of Good Works germinate in you: No
 more to Eternity, shall he visit you that comes
 from on high. Nor shall you only want
 Spiritual, but even Bodily good things, not
 only Eternal, but Temporal Goods: There
 will be no dazzling Mettals for you, no Recrea-
 ting Diversions, no Comfort nor Consolati-
 on, but ye shall be like that Figtree, which
 as soon as it had my Malediction, immedi-
 ately wither'd at the Roots. *Into the fire,*
 that is into a furnace of exceedingly hot and
 unquenchable fire, which will not seize up-
 on some single Member, but on all together,
 and afflict you with most sensible pain. *Ever-*
lasting, i. e. into fire which needs no fuel
 to maintain the vehemency of heat, for
 'tis kindled by the breath of Almighty God,
 that as the guilt which is in you will never be
 done away, so neither shall your punishment
 have an end. Therefore the Prophet *Esaias*
 had reason to cry out, *Who amongst you can*
abide with devouring flame? Who can dwell with
everlasting burning? As much as to say, not a
 Man can patiently bear them, but they shall
 be constrain'd to bear them with impatience,
 indignation, and despair. And in the 66th
 Chap. he adds, *Their worm dyeth not, and their* Isa. 33.
fire is not quenched. Which words we find re-
 peated more than once in *St. Mark.* For the
Worm of Conscience will be superadded to
 their other Afflictions, as will also the bit-
 ter Remembrance of that time, in which the
 wicked

wicked might easily have escaped punishment; had they endeavour'd it, and have been partakers of everlasting Joys. And lest any should fancy that the damned may find some alleviation of their sorrows, by walking about and exchanging place; hear what our Lord himself saith, "*Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" Therefore those poor wretches, being tyed Hand and Foot in eternal bands, shall always be confin'd to the same place, depriv'd of the Light of Sun, Moon, and Stars: And frying in those fires which are heated with Divine fury, shall weep and lament, and gnash their teeth out of Rage and Despair. Nor shall they only suffer most doleful miseries in Hell, that shall be thrust into that place of horror, but also extream poverty, disgrace, and ignominy, with the utmost Shame and Confusion of face. For in a moment shall they be depriv'd of their Palaces, Fields, and Vineyards, and of their numerous Flocks and Herds; they shall be stripp'd of their gay and fashionable Apparel; they shall no longer behold their glittering Silver and Gold, nor their sparkling Gems and Diamonds; they shall be reduc'd to such Circumstances, as to petition for a drop of cold Water, and find a Denial. Besides, those haughty, and vain-glorious Men, who cannot now brook the least injury, or affront, and that prefer the support of their Grandeur above all things besides, shall see all their Crimes and Misdemeanours brought to light, and publickly expos'd upon a Stage, where all Mankind,

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and the whole company of Angels shall be spectators, the greatest Appearance that ever was, or shall be; all their crimes, I say, shall become manifest, though committed in secrecy, and conceal'd in the obscurest recesses of the Heart, though never so abominable, such as Treacheries, Robberies, Incests, Sacrilege: For as the Apostle saith, in his former Epistle to the Corinthians, *When the Lord shall come to judge the world, he will bring to light the secret things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every one have praise from God; and sure at that time every wicked, and unrighteous person shall instead of Praise, find Rebukes and Dispraise from God.* But so great will be the Shame and Confusion of the Wicked at this Appearance, that St. Basil thinks not to say, that 'twill be one of the most grievous Punishments, especially to the Hypocritical, Proud, and Vain-glorious, who have no other God, (or rather Idol) in this World, but Honour. But if what we have said concerning the loss of all that is valuable both here and hereafter, of that most afflictive Pain, and that Disgrace and Ignominy, which wait upon the Impenitent to another World, were ever to End, or to have any Intermixture of Consolation or Refreshment, (as all Misfortunes have in this life;) they might in some Measure be accounted tolerable Evils. But since 'tis certain, and past all doubt, that as the Felicity of the blessed will eternally last without having any alloy of Misery; so also the Torments of the damned will everlastingly continue without any

St Basil

any Intermixtures of Comfort ; since this is the case, they certainly are blind and infatuated to the last Degree, that exert not their utmost endeavours to gain Heaven, and to share in the Joys of the Celestial Paradise, though the way lies through Briars, and Thorns, through Tribulations and Dangers, through Infamy and Death, all which the Apostle calls *light and momentary afflictions*.

CHAP. V.

AND if to any one it seems unaccountable, why a God of infinite Mercies hath appointed such severe and lasting Punishments for the offences of Men, which are done and past in an instant, and for such as appear not very provoking ; let the objector hear what St. *Augustin* hath to say in his Book of the City of God : “ Whoever (saith he) reckons such Condemnation “ either unjust, or too severe, knows not “ certainly how to make a right estimate of “ the greatness of Mens iniquity in Sinning, “ when with so much ease they might have “ preserv’d themselves innocent. And afterwards the same Father saith, “ Who can sufficiently declare the Greatness of his Sin, “ who disobey’d the Command of so great “ a God, and that threatned so great Punishment, when he might without difficulty “ have obey’d ? St. *Augustin* speaks of *Adam’s* Sin, but there is a parity of Reason concerning Sin in general. For if we bring not deceitful, but honest and just Balances, we shall find

find every deadly Sin to be very grievous on a threefold account? For it is an horrible thing for a Creature to disobey his Creator, when as the Dignity of the Creator is at an infinite distance from the meanness of the Creature. Besides the Creature is naturally a Slave, and the Creator a Lord by Nature: and the Creature is indebted to the Creator for all it hath, but the Creator is in no regard owing to the Creature. But if the Creator did indeed impose hard things on his Creatures, Obedience would still be their Duty. But the Apostle truly saith, *His commandments are not grievous*; and our Lord himself affirms, *That his yoke is easie, and his burden light*. How great, and inexpressible a Crime then is it for poor worms of the Earth, not to obey their Creator in a matter so facile and easie? Besides, had not God threatned transgressors with the punishment of eternal Death, Man perhaps might have pretended some Excuse for his Sin, but since eternal punishment hath been so frequently and plainly denounced by the Prophets and Apostles, what excuse can be offer'd for the obstinacy of Sinners? And lastly, if the guiltiness of Sinners were not eternal, we might wonder why the punishment of Sin is so? But when the stubbornness of the damned is eternal, why should it be any wonder that their punishment is eternal likewise? And this obstinacy of the Will in evil, which shall be common to the damned with Devils: I say, this perverseness of the Will and Alienation thereof, from God the supream Good, which remains eternally riveted in them, doth create in Holy Men a greater Abhorrence

² Jo. 5.
Mat. 11.

rency of a deadly Sin, than of Hell-fire it self. Do but attend to what *Edner*, an Englishman, records of *Anselm* in the second Book of his Life. My Conscience (saith he) attests to the Truth of what I declare, *viz*, that I have often heard *Anselm* affirm, (appealing to Truth) that if he could see embodied, the Horreur of Sin on one side, and the Pains of Hell on the other, and must of necessity be immers'd in one of the two, he would rather make choice of Hell than of Sin. Another thing he used to say, (to some Men perhaps as unaccountable as the other,) That he had rather have his Portion in Hell, being Innocent and free from Sin, than being polluted therewith, to be possess'd of the Kingdom of Heaven. If that Holy Man spake these things as the true Sentiments of his Mind, and knew by Divine Illumination, that the Weight of Sin is greater than the punishment of Hell; how much more shall God, who searches to the bottom of the Malignity, Filthiness, and perverseness of Sin, act like a most righteous Judge in Decreeing, that the punishment which he has appointed from Eternity is a due reward of Sin? Therefore, my Soul, do not mistake, nor be misled, nor imitate those, *who say they know God, but in fact deny him*: for many have faith only habitually, not actually, like a Sword never unsheath'd for execution. For if they did actually believe, and believing did seriously consider, that God is faithful and just, and has really provided very severe and endless Punishments for the ungodly and impenitent, and such as shall have no Consolation intermixt, it were impossible they should act as now they

they do, or, as *Job* saith, *Should drink iniquity like water, i. e.* with so much unconcern'dness, with so little apprehension of danger, nay, with so much Complacency, and Satisfaction, should commit such great and heinous Crimes, as if a reward, not punishment were due to Sinners. Do thou, my Soul, firmly believe, and believing consider again, and again, that God is now the Father of Mercies, and very ready to forgive all that are truly penitent; but that when this life shall determine, the same God will be a God of Vengeance with a witness, and will inflict those Punishments upon Offenders which he hath prepar'd, and which he commanded to be denounc'd by his Prophets and Apostles, and to be committed to Writing for the minding Posterity of their Duty. For so it will come to pass, that being lifted up by the fear of unsufferable Torments, and the Hope of everlasting Rewards, as it were with two Wings, thou mayest safely pass through the Storms and Tempests of this present World, and at last arrive at the Port of eternal Life and Tranquillity. *Amen,*

Amen.

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